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The Severed Head; OR, The Secret of Castle Coucy.

A Legend of the Great Crusade.

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AUTHOR OF "THE DUKE OF DIAMONDS," "THE
ROCK RIDER," "DOUBLE DEATH," "THE
IRISH CAPTAIN," ETC., ETC.

PROLOGUE.

THE moon shone down in full splendor over the domes and towers of Jerusalem on the night of the 13th of July, 1099, and beheld the city surrounded by the white tents of a great army of besiegers. From the mount of Olives on the east to Calvary on the west, from Tophet on the south to the Sepulchers of the Kings on the north, the Holy Places were girdled with a wall of camps as completely as in the days of Titus, a thousand years before. On the summit of the

Mount of Olives was grouped a mass of large and commodious pavilions, above which waved idly in the night breeze the great white banner, marked with a red cross, that distinguished the head-quarters of Godfrey de Bouillon, the renowned leader of the Crusade, while the illustrious Tancred's lion banner was planted at the side of Mount Calvary.

The valley of the Brook Kedron, with its steep and precipitous sides, was buried in black shadow, and yet it seemed to be the only place where anything was stirring, for sounds of wild, unearthly laughter proceeding from it at intervals showed where the foul hyenas were at work on the unburied bodies of those who had fallen in the sallies of the day before. Otherwise all was quiet, the mail-clad sentries dozing on their posts, camp and city alike buried in silence.

It seemed an uninviting place to enter in the darkness amid those uncanny beasts, and yet it was into this very valley that two men stole quietly from the Christian camp, about an hour after midnight. Both were wrapped in long dark cloaks, on the shoulder of which was worked the white cross, and the gleam of mail

hood, helmet and hose showed that they were warriors of some rank, who fought on horseback; not part of the foot rabble of the army.

Down into the black valley among the old tombs and the moldering skeletons of the dead, as yet unburied, went the two men, and paused at last by the curious round vault with conical top, still known as "Absalom's Tomb," where they looked around, as if expecting some person.

"Fore Saint Denis," growled one of the men, a short, stoutly-built fellow, "if this Turkish dog does not keep his appointment we have no time to lose, Master Gaston. The assault is for to-morrow, and if the Sieur Guy survive that we shall never have such a chance again."

He spoke in a rough, coarse tone, to which his companion replied:

"Hush, Denis, not so loud. There may be some one lurking within ear-shot, even now."

The man called Denis shrugged his shoulders, as he pointed to a group of hyenas, crunching the bones of a corpse near by, and answered:

"None will venture here while those brutes are about."

"Hist!" interrupted the tall man, with a ner-



INSTINCTIVELY ST. POL TURNED, AND BEHELD THE FACE OF THE SYRIAN, SEEMINGLY FLOATING IN THE AIR.

vous start, laying his hand on Denis's arm; "I hear some one, now."

"It is our Turk, Master Gaston," replied Denis, promptly. "Yonder he comes."

He pointed to a turbaned figure in mail approaching them from the direction of the city, and Master Gaston heaved a sigh of relief, or regret—it was hard to say which—as the Turk approached them.

He was a tall, dignified-looking man, with long, black beard, and he was accoutered in the light chain-mail vest and rich garments which bespoke him a warrior of some distinction among his countrymen.

"The French chief wished to see me, and I am here," he said, in the jargon, called "Lingua Franca," common to both sides in the days of the crusades, full of Arabic words, and something like the "pigeon English" of Canton today in its origin and use.

"You are the Emir Bou Sheer?" asked Master Gaston, interrogatively.

"I am Alee Mohammed Abou Sheer, Son of the Lion," answered the infidel, proudly. "When I stamp my foot, ten thousand horsemen are ready to follow me from the hills of Armenia. What would the Frank?"

"I want safety from a rival, who must fall as a soldier," rejoined Gaston, eagerly. He is to lead the assault on the Tower of David, in the morning, and we are to follow him. He must die, and by the hands of your men."

"Why does not the Frank kill his foe himself, like a man?" demanded the Emir, with a tone of scorn.

Master Gaston shuddered and crossed himself, as he muttered:

"I cannot, I cannot. He carries the cross, and his father was my father's brother."

The Turk allowed a slight smile of contempt to curl his lip. Brought up in a land where wholesale slaughters of inconvenient brothers were the common events at the accession of every new sultan, he could not understand the superstitious scruples of the Christian villain, whose artificial conscience did not hesitate at any treachery, yet seemed unwilling to imbrue itself in actual bloodshed by the hand of its owner.

"What then does the Frank wish me to do?" he asked.

"Tell him, Denis, I cannot," replied Gaston, in a smothered tone; and the short man took up the thread of the story boldly enough.

"Simple enough," he ejaculated. "The assault is set for to-morrow, and we shall take the city. We are on the side of the Tower of David. After the first rush, we will give back, allow you to break through and get away, if you will but kill him for us. He is a rash fool, ever in the advance, and we can desert him, easy enough."

At this infamous proposition, even the Turk, hardened as he was to all sorts of iniquity, shuddered, slightly. He made no reply, but stroked his beard and stared at the two men in silent amazement. At last Denis burst out: "Well, well, your answer to this. Will you do it?"

The Turk gave a sort of grunt, as he stroked his beard again, and demanded:

"How shall I know the man?"

"By his armor, laced with gold, and the device on his shield."

"And what is that?"

"It bears a gold chevron on a scarlet ground, with the motto: *Je suis ni roi ni prince aussi; Je suis Le Sire de Coucy*," answered Denis, glibly. The Turk shook his head.

"I read no French. What does it all mean?"

"No king nor prince am I. I am the Master of Coucy."

Abou Sheer threw back his head, and a pleased smile shone on his face.

"That must be a proud warrior," he replied, in a musing tone.

"He is the head of the proudest house in France," broke in Master Gaston, in muffled tones. "If you kill him and make me Master of Coucy, name your reward, and escape when you will."

The Turk was again silent as he stroked his beard. At last he said:

"A thousand marks of Frankish money must be laid on the tomb of Abraham at Hebron, if you take the city. For that sum you shall have the headless body of your dead kinsman. Swear it on your cross."

Gaston complied by repeating the oath with trembling lips over the cross of his sword, and the Turk nodded as if satisfied. Then, without another word, he rode away. When he was some hundred yards off, he spat suddenly on the ground with an expression of great disgust, and said:

"The curse of Allah on all traitors."

Morning dawned again over the Holy City on the famous 14th July, 1099, the day the Crusaders stormed Jerusalem. From an early hour all were astir, and the glitter and sparkle of armor encircled the city as the embattled hosts moved down to the assault. It was a curious sign of the fantastic notions of the day that the French knights, who counted it the glory and privilege of their order to fight on horseback, had been very unwilling to consent to the as-

sault of the city at all, inasmuch as it would compel them to dismount.

They even insisted on a challenge being sent to the Turkish Governor to come out and make a fight in the open field; but when the Moslem, who was an old soldier, laughed at the proposition and defied them to drive him out, they became eager to avenge the insult, even on foot.

The Turks were mustered on their walls, waiting for the attack, with stores of boiling oil and quicklime to cast down on the besiegers, while archer and slinger prepared bolt and bullet to repel the attack which all knew was coming. A siege in those days was a very different thing from now. The nearest approach to artillery was in the shape of the catapults and mangonels, constructed by both sides, which were nothing more than enormous cross-bows, bent by windlass power, casting arrows ten feet long or two hundred pound stones.

But inasmuch as these engines, powerful as they were, could not batter down stone walls, it was necessary either to run mines close to the ramparts or to approach them under massive shields called "tortoises," with battering-rams under cover, propelled by hundreds of arms.

Three mines had been run under the walls of Jerusalem by the Christians, the openings being propped up by timbers; and at the signal for assault on that morning all the supports were fired at the same time. Then, while the smoke and flames told the Turks of their danger, the Crusaders advanced a lofty wooden tower on rollers, from the upper part of which a drawbridge was let down on the Moslem ramparts.

On the summit of this tower waved the scarlet banner with the gold chevron that displayed the haughty motto of De Coucy, and here it was that the brunt of the assault was expected to take place.

A tall and remarkably handsome young knight, whose clear-cut features and dark eyes told of his Southern blood, commanded the assault at this point, his gold-twined hauberk and the device on his shield showing that he was the Master of Coucy, against whom such vile plots had been hatching at the hands of his kinsman, only a few hours before.

He had a frank open face and a manner of great kindness to his followers, who seemed to look up to him as a demigod. Near him stood his cousin, Master Gaston, whose face, now that the light of day shone on it, looked like that of a haughty, vindictive man. The squire, Denis, was a type of the worst kind of soldier, coarse, brutal and rapacious.

At last came the signal when all the trumpets sounded together, the flames burst forth from the mines, the battering-rams assaulted the gates, and the great tower moved to the wall. Then Guy, Master of Coucy, turned to his men and said:

"Remember, children, that the first man over the wall wins a crown of glory. Advance my banner, Eustace! Forward, all!"

He spoke to his squire, a very tall though slender and handsome young man, hardly more than a boy in years.

Then the drawbridge clanged down, and over the wall streamed the assaulting column. They were met with ferocious ardor by the Turks, headed by the Emir Abou Sheer himself, and for a few moments the strife was hot and heavy. At last the superior weight and armor of the stalwart Christians prevailed over the more slenderly-framed Asiatics, and the Turks began to give way.

Then it was that Guy de Coucy, followed by Eustace with the banner, rushed into the midst of the retreating Moslems, raging like a lion, and then too it was that Gaston de Coucy and his squire, who had been behind the foremost, suddenly raised a cry of alarm.

"The tower is burning! back!"

In a hot fight like this, the slightest incident will sometimes turn the current of success into disaster. A few men looked back, saw that smoke was indeed eddying round the tower, from whence they knew not; and the next moment the lately victorious Crusaders had deserted their chief and his squire, and were running back in a panic over the drawbridge into the tower, followed by the Moslems, shouting out curses.

Ere one could tell what had happened, the Moslems, under Abou Sheer, had made a sally through the deserted Christian camp, seizing the horses in the stables, and the amazed followers of De Coucy, recovering their senses, looked up at the walls to find themselves disgraced, the city taken by the other columns, while the banner of the gold chevron was gone, and with it the Master of Coucy and his squire.

Then, when it was too late to do any good, Gaston de Coucy waxed valiant on a sudden, made for the tower again, where the fire turned out to be but a few bundles of straw, and rushed into the now helpless city with loud shouts, slaying all the defenseless ones he met.

Jerusalem was taken, and the hoofs of Godfrey de Bouillon's charger splashed up to the fetlocks in Mussulman blood in the courts of the Mosque of Omar, but the Master of Coucy had disappeared.

The news did not spread till late at night, when questions were asked about De Coucy; and then it was said that he had been lost in the assault. Whether a prisoner or killed, no one could tell, and the followers of his house, ashamed of their morning's panic, affected to know nothing about it. But late at night, Denis, Gaston's squire, who had been loud-mouthed and eager in the search, brought in the sad intelligence that the body was found, and sure enough, there in the very center of the Christian camp lay a headless corpse in the armor of Guy de Coucy.

Of course there were inquiries as to how it got there, and gradually the story of the repulse and sally leaked out, with that of the loss of horses to the Christians. It was a great disgrace to the Army of the Cross, and many were the taunts and rebukes cast on the renegades who had abandoned their chief to death, but it was remarked that Gaston de Coucy took all the abuse very philosophically, and that he was among the first of the Crusaders to return home to Provence. By the death of his cousin Guy, who died heirless, he had become the rightful Master of Coucy, and he hesitated not to claim his rights as soon as possible.

Only one reminder of the untimely fate of Guy, Master of Coucy, was left at home, and that was his young widow, Adeline, from whose side he had been drawn by the preaching of Peter the Hermit, even on his wedding-day.

From the lips of Gaston the poor lady first heard that she was a widow.

CHAPTER I.

THE EMIR'S ENVOY.

SEVEN summers had come and gone since the memorable day when Jerusalem was taken by the Crusaders, and the twelfth century had progressed till it had become an old story.

The springtime woods had burst into leaf in the south of France, the lark was singing in the meadow, and the nightingales made the woods ring with melody, while the grim walls of Coucy Castle lost half their sternness amid the fresh green of the ivy. The fields were pied with buttercups and daisies, and the cowslips perfumed the air; while the pink blossoms of the hawthorn in the hedges added their tribute to the all-pervading sweetness of spring.

Coucy Castle stood in the quiet and peaceful south of France, at the borders of Provence, in that Languedoc where the minstrels flourished and sung, while yet all the rest of the world were fighting like a horde of barbarians.

It was therefore by no means an uncommon sight that greeted the eyes of the sentry on the watch-tower of Coucy, when he saw a gayly-appeared minstrel, followed by a page, riding toward the castle along the shady lanes of Languedoc, one evening about sunset.

The minstrel had something in his appearance to distinguish him from most of his tribe, who were wont to go unarmed and to wear only two colors, violet and crimson, in their dress.

This man seemed to combine the characters of warrior and poet in person and apparel. He wore a complete suit of plain steel mail, which was yet only partially revealed by garments of oriental cut, the colors of which were a vivid scarlet slashed with lemon. The most remarkable part of his equipment in Christian eyes was the turban of scarlet silk, wound and twined up with heavy gold cord, round a helmet that looked as if made of solid gold, so brightly did it blaze in the sun. From the summit of this helmet rose a slender rod of gold, ending in the shape of a lotus flower, from whence streamed several plumes of the bird of Paradise, then entirely unknown in Europe.

This brilliant figure was mounted on a bright bay horse, whose slender limbs, so different from those of the heavy Norman chargers then in vogue, told of his Arabian blood.

To cut description short, the dress of this personage was decidedly of Eastern fashion, while his dark, equine face, with its glossy black beard trimmed to a point, aided the impression. His only visible weapon was a curved cimeter, while the page behind him was even less heavily armed, a long dagger, then used for eating purposes, being apparently his sole protection.

It was, however, the equipment of this page that showed the minstrel character of his master, for he bore at his back a lute, very richly inlaid with ivory, pearl and gold, while the colors of his livery showed that he belonged to the other.

This singular-looking pair slowly approached the castle of Coucy, while the sentry on the tower gazed at them in surprise.

"By the bones of St. James of Biggorre," he muttered; "these Turkish dogs wax impudent since the truces. What is he doing here?"

The sentry had been in the Crusade, and knew that since the capture of Jerusalem more than one truce had been made with the Moslems, by which intercourse between them and the Christians had been promoted to mutual advantage. He, being an ignorant soldier, but not blind to the fact that the Saracens were in those days more civilized than the French, hated them devoutly, and therefore resented the coming of this seeming Moslem stranger, riding peacefully into France.

However, as tranquilly as if he had lived there all his life, the brilliant stranger rode up to the gate of Coucy Castle, which he found open, with the drawbridge down.

So far the promise of a welcome seemed good, and the mail-clad minstrel rode on, only checking his horse at the edge of the bridge when confronted by the figure of the squire of Gaston de Coucy, Denis Morbec by name.

This man, always short and broad, had grown fat during the incumbency of his lord as Master of Coucy, and now strutted forward with all the important airs of the chief of the castle himself, demanding:

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

The stranger paused a few moments to look at the figure before him with a gravely inquiring aspect, ere he rejoined:

"Thou art Denis Morbec. I come from the Emir Abou Sheer, to claim the price of the work sworn to in the valley of the Brook Kedron."

For a moment the purple face of Denis lost a portion of its color, but then he recovered and blurted out:

"What mean'st thou, dog of a Turk?"

"I am no Turk," interrupted the other, sternly, "but as good a Christian as any here. Where is thy master?"

"Away hunting," was the reluctant answer, forced by surprise, as Denis stared at this singularly appareled stranger.

"Then see that our beasts are attended to, while we await his coming," said the stranger, preparing himself to dismount. "I am George of Antioch, a Syrian Christian minstrel, who has crossed the seas on purpose to meet the Master of Coucy, face to face."

He had taken his right foot out of the stirrup, when Denis raised his hand warningly.

"You get no shelter here," he cried. "My master hates minstrels and all their belongings. Away with you!"

"I come not as a minstrel, but as an envoy," was the quiet reply, to which Denis rejoined:

"Minstrel or envoy, it is all one. You cannot enter here."

As he spoke, the surly squire set a whistle to his lips and blew a long blast, which brought a dozen men-at-arms running up.

"Get thee gone, George of Antioch," he continued, "or we'll try how a quarrel* from an arblast fits thy case."

The strange minstrel pointed to the north, where a heavy bank of clouds had gathered, and where the growling of thunder was now almost incessant, as he remonstrated:

"Dost thou not know that a great storm is approaching? I had heard that the Castle of Coucy was famed for its hospitality."

"Hospitality is for fools," was the polite response. "When my master is away, I show none."

"Where then is thy master?" asked George of Antioch; and hardly had the question left his lips, when the clear, mellow notes of a horn echoed through the woods in the vicinity of Coucy Castle.

Denis uttered a short, scornful laugh as he retorted:

"Yonder he comes now. An he find thee here, 'twill not be the first minstrel, let alone a Turk, that he has had hung up over the castle gate. Begone, while thou art safe."

George of Antioch looked at the surly squire in apparent amazement.

"Hang a minstrel!" he ejaculated. "Here, in the land where minstrels are honored! Man, thou liest. Even the Master of Coucy dare not do it."

Again Denis laughed an evil, ugly laugh, watching keenly meanwhile the brown sandy road which led into the forest from whence the horn had sounded. Already he could discern the occasional sparkle of spear-heads, that told of the coming of his master's cavalcade, and he seemed not unwilling to detain the minstrel till it arrived.

"The Master of Coucy has power of life and death on his own lands, as thou wouldst know, wert thou not a heathen stranger," he snarled. "Have thine own way and ask for hospitality, if thou darest when thou seest the lord. They call him the minstrel-killer."

The face of the Syrian minstrel grew dark and stern as he listened to the insolent squire, and he half-turned his horse away from the castle to watch the approaching cavalcade, which just then swept into sight.

There were some thirty or forty persons in the train, which was led by the tall, heavy figure of Master Gaston. They were all dressed in the colors of Coucy, and bore hunting spears and short swords.

Gaston, in the years of opulence and ease that he had enjoyed since the treachery of Jerusalem, had become somewhat corpulent, and rode rather slowly in advance. Behind him came two men, leading between them a third clad in the coarse garments of a peasant, who was evidently a prisoner; for his arms were

pinioned and his feet tied together under the belly of the horse on which he sat. As the cavalcade approached, one might see that his face was deadly pale, and streaked with blood from a sword-cut on the head.

George of Antioch gazed a little while at the hunting train with their prisoner, then looked up at the sky, where the ragged gray edge of the great black cloud was already nearly over the castle. Then he suddenly seemed to make up his mind, for he cantered away to meet De Coucy. As he went, Denis noticed that he carried on the right side of his saddle a short heavy mace with a head fashioned like a star, a mass of spikes, and that the page bore a similar weapon.* The two were not then so defenseless as they had at first seemed.

George of Antioch drew up his horse in front of the Lord of Coucy and courteously addressed him.

"I wish your lordship all health and happiness. I am George of Antioch, a Syrian Christian minstrel, bearing letters from the noble Godfrey, King of Jerusalem, and craving the hospitality of your castle for the night."

Gaston de Coucy seemed to have grown as surly and insolent as his squire, for he turned on the other a gaze of scornful inquiry, measuring him from head to foot, ere he answered:

"I hate minstrels. They are strolling vagabonds, too lazy to work, too cowardly to fight. Sleep in the woods, as many a better man has done before thee. Come on, men."

He touched his big Norman horse with the spur and rode on to the castle, leaving the Syrian minstrel alone.

George of Antioch remained a moment as if thunderstruck, and then his eyes fell on the ghastly face of the pinioned prisoner.

The sight seemed to have a strange effect on him, for he started back in his saddle, ejaculating:

"Jacques Marcel!"

"Ay, Jacques Marcel, as bad a poaching rogue as any in the land," growled one of the man's guardians. "We caught him with a hare in the snare, and he swings for it."

Again George of Antioch started and a moment later he dashed up beside De Coucy, whom he hurriedly addressed:

"My lord, my lord, if you will not grant me hospitality for the love of the gentle craft of music, at least grant me one boon for the sake of honor, of knighthood, ay, of the Holy Cross itself. Grant me the life of this poor man, the foster-brother of Guy de Coucy, from whom thou drawest thine inheritance. Should a man die for a hare?"

Gaston de Coucy was so much amazed at the presumption of the request that he actually allowed the Syrian to finish his speech. Then his face flushed a deep crimson with fury as he roared out:

"Dog of a minstrel, he dies if he were fifty brothers of Guy. Not a word, or by the bones of St. Denis thou swingest beside him. Away!"

Then George of Antioch suddenly straightened up in his saddle, his eyes flashed fire, and he in his turn shouted, in clear, clarion tones:

"Ay, is it so? Then hear me, Gaston de Coucy. I come from the Emir Bou Sheer! The money, the thousand marks for which thou soldst thy cousin, is not paid. Give it me, or, by Our Blessed Lady, I swear to carry thy case to Paris before the king, thy liege lord. Dost hear?"

He spoke so loudly that all the men around heard him plainly, and before he had said a dozen words Gaston turned deadly pale and his jaw dropped, while the men stared in amazement and whispered each other.

Then the Master of Coucy seemed to recover himself, as the squire had done before him, and his color returned. He saw that the other possessed a dangerous secret, at the same time that he recognized his own power to bury that secret forever.

He was a feudal lord on his own lands, with all the power of life and death which pertained to the office—an absolute despot.

George of Antioch watched him keenly and seemed to divine the thoughts crossing his mind, for he suddenly drew this cimeter, sharp as a razor, crying:

"Be it so, then. Here's for a rescue."

As he spoke he dealt the horse of Gaston a blow on the crown that half-divided the head from the body, when down went the poor animal, stone-dead, rolling on its rider.

As the Syrian had anticipated the blow produced immediate confusion in the ranks, the very audacity of the assault aiding to confound Gaston's followers.

Shouting out some words in Arabic to his page, the active warrior-minstrel wheeled his horse and made a blow at one of the prisoner's guardians.

The man, who had not yet drawn, was so amazed that he could only throw up his arm with an instinctive motion, the exposed limb being instantly lopped off near the elbow, as by a razor.

The page, a slender, fair-faced boy, proved himself no mean adversary at the same moment, dealing the other guardian a tap with his spiked mace on the side of the head.

The prisoner, ghastly as he had been, was not so weak but that he retained his wits. The instant he felt his arms released, he worked his heels into the sides of his horse as fast as his bonds would allow him, shouted to the animal, and galloped away full speed.

Then down into the midst of the fracas came a torrent of rain, illumined by the blinding glare of the lightning, while the thunder volleyed and crashed overhead as if heaven had burst open. The Syrian minstrel and his page, heedless of the turmoil, tore away at full speed after the escaping prisoner, while the castle train clustered in dire confusion round their fallen lord.

There seemed to be no thought of pursuit in that tempest, for the blast of the wind was so tremendous, the fury of the descending torrents of hail and rain so appalling that the first instinct of all was to find a shelter somewhere, the nearer the better.

Gaston de Coucy, groaning and bruised, was pulled out from under his fallen horse and hurried into the castle, where all his train soon found shelter, leaving the minstrel, the page and the poacher, out in the woods in the full fury of the tempest. The weather had been hot and sultry for several days preceding the storm, early spring though it was, and the elements seemed to be bent on making up for their period of repose.

The last thing seen of the Syrian stranger, he and the other two were at the edge of the forest, lost in a gray mist of falling rain.

CHAPTER II.

A FEUDAL CASTLE.

FOR over two hours the storm raged in full fury, many a noble tree being prostrated by the wind; and then the clouds cleared away from the face of the heavens, driving along in fleeting masses of scud, between which the moon, in her second quarter, looked out upon the flooded landscape.

The Count of St. Pol had nearly finished his supper, when his seneschal, whom he had sent out to look at the weather, returned with the intelligence that the storm had broken and that a minstrel from Palestine, called George of Antioch, was at the gate, asking hospitality for himself and his servants.

The Count of St. Pol was a jolly knight and one who loved mirth and music, therefore he smote his knee with a mighty oath and ordered the instant and courteous admission of the minstrel.

"For I have heard no news from the world for a month," he said; "since our gentle friend, Etienne Marot, the jongleur*—peace to him, wherever he be—left the castle. And as for Carcassou, the jester, I have heard all his jokes so often that I fall asleep listening to them."

Therefore when George of Antioch, who had ridden fifteen miles at a gallop, with the storm to drive him on, arrived in the hall of St. Pol Castle, he was met by a reception as courteous and kind as that accorded to him at Coucy, had been surly and inhospitable. The count himself, a red-faced, hearty warrior, with iron gray hair and mustache, came to the very door of the hall to meet him and drew him in by main force, protesting that the castle and all within it were at the service of any professor of the gentle art.

"Wherein," he admitted, "I am but a clumsy bungler, my fingers suiting better the couching hollow of a lance than the neck of a lute. Yet love I the voice of the sweet jongleur, though mine own be like that of the raven. Enter, sir minstrel, and my people shall relieve thee of these wet garments and care for thy servants. So glad have I not been since Etienne Marot entered the castle, a year since."

The worthy count, bred up in the hospitable ways of the early feudal chiefs, took no apparent notice of the strange costume and bearded face of the stranger, albeit both were very unusual in those days of close shaving, but confined himself entirely to making his guest comfortable. An hour later, George of Antioch, wrapped in one of St. Pol's own velvet mantles bordered with fur, sat by the huge wood fire at the head of the hall, on the dais or raised platform, beside his host, while his two servants were being entertained at the table below.

St. Pol had been a Crusader in his time, and knowing from the name of his visitor that he was a Syrian Christian, began to ask for news of the Holy Land as soon as the minstrel had supped.

"And how left ye the noble Godfrey King of Jerusalem, sir minstrel? Held he his own bravely against the heathen still?"

"The most noble the King of Jerusalem, with Baldwin of Edessa and Bohemond of Antioch, were smiting the heathen daily," replied the Syrian. "The domain of the Christians extends more and more, as new pilgrims settle there. The Crusade hath stricken terror to the Turks. But canst thou tell me, noble sir count, what is the name of the castle about five leagues from here, on the road to Marseilles, which I passed as the storm came on?"

*Jongleur, the mediæval name for a minstrel, commonly used.

*It is hardly necessary, but may be useful, to remind our readers that the short, square-headed bolts sent from the arblast, or cross-bow, were called "quarrels."

St. Pol's jolly red face became grave in a moment.

"That is the castle of Gaston de Coucy," he replied, a little dryly. "There is scant hospitality there for any of the gentle craft."

"I know it to my sorrow," rejoined the other. "They drove me thence out into the storm like a dog, as I craved shelter."

St. Pol fidgeted in his chair, as he growled out some inarticulate remarks, and then suddenly broke out:

"He is a false knight: and could I find another gentleman or two of my mind, we would harry his lands and burn his pigsty over his head. Heaven's malison on him for a selfish swine!"

The Syrian looked at him keenly.

"Then why not fight him alone?" he asked, quietly.

"God knows I would like to," answered the count. "But he is the richest and most powerful knight in France, for all he disdains a title, even that of duke, but is content to be plain Master of Coucy. He can put ten lances in the field to my three, and such a neighbor is troublesome as an enemy."

George of Antioch nodded his head slowly and looked at the fire a few minutes, ere he said:

"True; and yet methinks a just cause would compensate for the small numbers. Was there not another Master of Coucy once, who went to Jerusalem?"

St. Pol's face lighted up with pleasure, and then fell again as at some sad memory.

"Alas, poor Guy!" he ejaculated. "Ah, good sir minstrel, he was a knight such as none see nowadays. A perfect knight, a soldier brave as his own sword, and withal as gentle as a young maid at her first communion. Ay, and he was a jongleur, such as we shall never see again. By the glory of Our Blessed Lady, his voice was like the cooing of the ring-dove in the forest when he sung, and Etienne Marot could not come near him at a romance. Ay, ay, he was a knight indeed."

"And what became of him?" asked the minstrel quietly, as St. Pol paused and gazed musingly into the fire.

"He died under the Cross, Heaven rest his soul!" was the sad reply; and St. Pol crossed himself piously and muttered a pater-noster.

The Syrian did not pursue the subject further for he saw that his host was unwilling to go on with it. The truth was that St. Pol remembered too well the suspicions of treason attending Guy de Coucy's death, but he did not care to speak of them seven years after, to a stranger, through whom they might be bruited abroad and used to embroil him with his powerful neighbor.

Still, the Syrian seemed to be quite curious about De Coucy, for he presently asked:

"Did not Guy de Coucy leave a wife and children?"

"A wife, if one can call her so. No children," was the curt answer.

"Why not call her wife?" asked the Syrian, in a tone that sounded like one of offense.

St. Pol glanced quickly at him and found him still gazing at the fire. He concluded that he had misunderstood the tone of his voice.

"I say his wife, because the church had joined them in the morning, but no bed nor board was ever shared between them. Within an hour of the priest's benediction came Peter the Hermit to the castle, preaching the great Crusade, and Guy de Coucy caught the fever and took the Cross, with sundry others of us, and never again did he meet the Lady Adeline alive, for the Turks left his headless body in the Christian camp the day Jerusalem was taken."

Again the Syrian nodded, slowly.

"Ay, ay, I have heard of it," he said.

St. Pol stared.

"Heard of it? Where?"

"In Palestine, from the Emir Aleé Mohammed Abou Sheer."

"Bou Sheer? Why, it was his band, they said, that slew De Coucy. Hast thou ever seen him? What is he like, this Bou Sheer?"

"They say he is the most like me of any man not a twin brother," answered the Syrian minstrel. "But what boots it to talk? De Coucy is dead and forgotten and the widow has wed again—is it not so?—perhaps even to Gaston de Coucy."

He spoke in a hard and bitter tone, but St. Pol interrupted him, warmly:

"Nay, now, nay, now, sir minstrel, no more of that or thou passest the privilege of a guest. The lady is as pure and bright to-day as God's blessed sunlight, and liveth in the west tower of Coucy Castle, all alone, like a holy nun. She will wed none, or by St. Denis, there are fifty knights ready to fight Gaston de Coucy for her hand."

"Indeed?" said the minstrel, in a tone of inquiry; and seemed about to add more, when his ear caught a faint musical sound in the cool night-air, outside.

St. Pol heard it too, and started.

"Hounds!" he ejaculated. "Hounds in full cry at night. These poachers wax bold, methinks. What is this?"

Both listened, intently, and again came unmistakably down on the breeze the musical cry

of a pack of hounds on a hot scent. The retainers in the lower part of the hall heard it, too, ceased their low conversation, and gathered in groups to listen. The sound was so startling and unusual at that hour of the night that it attracted the notice of every one.

St. Pol, who was, like all feudal chiefs, an enthusiastic huntsman and jealous preserver of game, strode to the great window at the head of the dais and opened one of the small diamond-shaped panes that revolved on pivots at the lower part of the window.

No sooner had he done so, than the cry of the hounds became quite plain. He listened a few moments, and then cried out, in a tone of undisguised anger:

"Now, by the mass, those are De Coucy's hounds! I know old Bellmouth's voice as well as any of my own. The insolent! Does he think to hunt on my lands without permission, because he is Master of Coucy? We shall see."

The class pride of the feudal lord was touched in a moment at the indignity, and he realized, also, that De Coucy would not be hunting in this open manner on his neighbor's land, in defiance of all the laws of feudal courtesy, unless he were prepared to maintain his insolence by the strong hand. But the insult was too open to leave St. Pol any discretion between resistance and submission, while the spirit of the French noble was too high for the latter.

"Call up all the men!" he shouted, in angry tones, turning away.

"Pike and sword, hauberk and crossbow! Bring me mine armor quickly. Man the walls! Get ready the furnaces and quicklime. Fore St. Denis, we will be ready for the insolents."

In a moment the hall was a scene of wild confusion, which lasted till every man was armed and at his post, an operation very quickly performed in those days, when private war was the normal state of feudal society, and no one knew what moment his house might be stormed.

Inside of ten minutes all was in order; St. Pol had assumed his hauberk, while the Syrian minstrel looked on with perfect placidity, without putting on his armor, very much to the surprise of his host.

Then succeeded that silence of expectation which comes over organized bodies of men expecting a battle for some moments before the actual shock.

In this pause the cry of the hounds outside became plainly audible, evidently close to the castle in the road, and coming toward the gate.

The hall in which they were was on the ground floor of the great donjon or keep of the castle, the residence of the knight himself, and opened on the court-yard, surrounded by ramparts and towers.

At a signal from St. Pol the great doors were thrown open, and one could see out into the moonlit court. No sooner was this done than the locality of the hounds became unmistakable. They were coming up the road to the gate.

Another signal from St. Pol and the retainers sallied out, running up the stone steps to the top of the ramparts and manning the towers. No one knew what to expect, but all seemed to apprehend an attack on the castle.

Among others St. Pol himself went to the towers that flanked the gate, and ascending to the summit, looked out on the moonlit landscape. Sure enough, there were several couples of hounds on the other side of the moat, bustling eagerly about with their noses to the ground, just at the mark which showed where the drawbridge rested when it was down.

Some of the dogs were sitting up on end, howling in mournful tones, and St. Pol ejaculated:

"They have run something into the castle. What can it be?"

"Myself," said a grave voice at his side, and the feudal chief, hardened as he was to all sorts of surprises, started in spite of his self-control. He could have sworn that he was alone, yet here was George of Antioch beside him, silent as a spirit, still unarmed and clad in the robe lent him by his host. The Syrian's face was grave and placid as he looked over the landscape.

"You will see men and horses follow the dogs presently," he observed. "Gaston de Coucy seeks my life."

St. Pol made no answer, for he had felt from the first that there was some connection between his guest and De Coucy.

Presently, as the Syrian had predicted, the glitter of spear-heads was seen in the moonlight, and St. Pol saw the road below the castle packed with men-at-arms and archers in a way that showed that the Master of Coucy must have raised all his available forces.

"Have you not a secret postern at the other side of the castle by which I can escape?" asked the Syrian, at this juncture. "I would not bring a siege upon so good a knight as you, noble St. Pol, and once in the open country I care nothing for those tortoises and snails."

"Not so," answered the count, stoutly. "My guest is my guest, to be defended, and not thrown out on the world. If thou hast done no treason, I will not give thee up while one stone of the donjon stands on another, or one man-at-arms can bend a bow."

Further conversation was cut short by the clatter and clash of De Coucy's party, who came jingling into the open ground in front of the castle, when the trumpets sounded a parley.

"Who are ye and what would ye?" roared St. Pol, from his station above the gate.

"We are from the Master of Coucy," shouted back a voice from below. "A strange minstrel has stolen from us a vassal of De Coucy, one Jacques Marcel, condemned to death. Give us the minstrel and Marcel, or dread De Coucy's vengeance."

"I know naught of your Marcells and minstrels," called out St. Pol. "Get ye gone to your master, or ye will find our arrows flying."

There was a short silence at this, and then the voice of Gaston de Coucy himself was heard.

"Be not foolish, St. Pol. I want my vassal, who has been poaching. Give him to me and the man who has stolen him. It is not fitting that thou shouldst shelter my foes."

Before St. Pol could reply the Syrian minstrel touched his arm and said in a low tone:

"Tell him that we are in the great hall and that he can have us if he will enter the castle with none but his squire. Pledge him thine honor as a knight that none shall interfere between us."

"But he will kill thee or thou him," objected the count. "I can allow no killing save my own in my own castle."

"And I swear to thee on the faith of a Christian and by the Holy Cross which saved us that not a drop of blood shall flow and that thou shalt see all that takes place," was the earnest reply of the minstrel. "My lord, I crave this boon in the name of all thou holdest sacred."

Thus urged, St. Pol could do no less than consent, and turned to the wall to state the terms of the agreement, which were immediately accepted with eager joy by Gaston de Coucy. Then the count turned again to seek George of Antioch, and the minstrel had vanished as silently as he had come.

Not feeling quite comfortable in his mind, St. Pol descended and conducted Gaston and Denis, who were fully armed, to the door of the great hall.

They found it wide open, but all within was as dark as pitch, though the moon outside was as bright as ever.

Before this mysterious blackness even St. Pol hesitated.

CHAPTER III.

MAGIC.

ST. POL himself, though a bold man and in his own castle, quailed for a moment, for there was something unnatural in the darkness of the great hall, provided as it was with great arched windows, full of stained glass. Now, it seemed as if every one of these windows had vanished, though the moon outside made the court nearly as light as day. The hall seemed to have been transformed at once into a gulf of darkness and desolation.

As the three armed men stood thus hesitating at the door, suddenly a glow of red light shot up at the end of the hall, in the midst of which they beheld a female figure clothed in white, beckoning them on.

St. Pol stared and rubbed his eyes. He was a confirmed bachelor, and, so far as he knew, not a woman had been in the castle when the portcullis was closed that night.

"What devil's mummery is this?" growled Denis. "The strange minstrel is a heathen after all, and practices magic. Let us take in torches."

His rough voice echoed through the dark hall, reverberating from side to side, but no answer came, save that the red light at the end of the hall shone brighter, and that they could distinguish that the chamber in front of the light was apparently empty.

"By St. Denis, St. Pol, dost thou wish to deceive us?" asked the Master of Coucy, angrily. "Where are these men for whom we asked?"

"Here!" was the unexpected reply, in a faint, sepulchral voice, from the end of the hall; and there in the midst of the red fire stood the figure of Jacques Marcel, his head swathed in blood-stained bandages, while beside him was the Syrian Minstrel, George of Antioch, now clothed in a long white robe and turban, and apparently unarmed.

Instantly Gaston de Coucy and Denis drew their swords and rushed into the hall, followed by St. Pol, who cried:

"Gentlemen, what means this? Drawn in my house! Put up your swords."

But ere they had taken a dozen steps a very strange thing occurred.

Without any visible agency the door clanged to behind them, and at the same moment the red glow vanished, leaving them enveloped in a darkness so thorough and complete that it seemed as if it could be felt.

Had the three been in a room of ordinary size the darkness would not have been so appalling, inasmuch as they could have reached a wall or something tangible in a short time.

But the hall of St. Pol was a great chamber, a hundred feet by sixty, entirely devoid of fur-

niture save at the dais end, and they were left in the middle of the smooth stone floor, as helpless, for all their armor, as three babes.

While in this sudden state of alarm and surprise, they heard strange sounds, as of bare feet shuffling to and fro, taps on the floor, and whispers all around them, so near that they turned involuntarily from side to side, till even St. Pol was completely bewildered as to the direction in which he was going.

That worthy knight in fact felt himself in the midst of his own hall, rapidly sinking into a state of complete demoralization, as these mysterious sounds hovered round him in the darkness. The sweat stood out on his brow, and it was with a desperate effort to recover his self-control that he finally drew his sword, and shouted:

"Get thee behind me, Sathanas!"

The sound of his voice seemed to break the spell, for almost immediately he heard his own name pronounced by the tones of George of Antioch, not many feet off.

"St. Pol," it said, "come hither, and leave these sinners to the fate in store for them."

Instinctively St. Pol turned in the direction of the voice and beheld the face of the Syrian, lit up by the same red glow which had first drawn them into the hall, but seemingly floating in the air, dissociated from any visible body.

With the instinct of a man in the dark to move toward any light, St. Pol eagerly rushed forward, only to see the face disappear.

But he felt the firm grasp of the Syrian minstrel, obviously that of solid flesh and blood, and heard the low whisper:

"This way—to the dais."

The superstitious knight, albeit trembling with a fear as unwonted as the occasion therefore, followed his conductor softly till he stumbled over the step of the dais, and for the first time realized in what part of the hall he was.

Then George of Antioch whispered:

"Sit here on the step, and fear naught, whatever thou seest or hearest. The justice of Heaven must be performed on these, but for thee there is no part in the vengeance."

Leaving the worthy nobleman completely stupefied with these words, the grasp of George of Antioch was released, and then St. Pol found himself all alone on the dais step, with no audible sound of footsteps to guide him as to the Syrian's departure.

And all this while not a sound had been heard from Gaston de Coucy and Denis Morbec in the middle of the hall. Where they were and what they were doing, St. Pol could not conjecture, so he sat and listened.

Presently he heard a deep groan in the darkness, followed by the clash of falling steel on the stone floor. Looking in the direction of the sound, he beheld a strange spectacle, that made him tremble in spite of himself.

There, in the midst of the hall, appeared a quivering white cloud that moved to and fro like the slow rolling of smoke, though no fire was visible, and in the midst of this cloud appeared the likeness, perfect in every feature, of the head of the dead Master of Coucy, just as St. Pol remembered to have seen him before Jerusalem, on the day of the assault.

A faint bluish light seemed to radiate from this mysterious head as it hovered in the air, glimmering through the white clouds of smoke, and St. Pol became aware of the strong odor of incense pervading the hall.

Then a delicate female voice was heard in the intense darkness that surrounded the floating apparition, singing some words in a strange tongue, and slowly the head of Guy de Coucy descended toward the floor, where the faint reflected light revealed the armed figure of Gaston crouching in mortal terror, his white face, drawn and haggard, upturned to the specter.

Beside Gaston, but still standing, St. Pol could distinguish the Squire Denis, whose bolder and coarser nature had not yet succumbed to the terrors of superstition.

As the count looked, he beheld Denis start forward with a furious curse, and the next moment the squire cut desperately at the head with his naked sword.

There was a chorus of hollow laughter, in which the female voice, previously heard, joined, and out went the light, leaving the hall as black as before.

Then St. Pol heard another groan and another clash, and rightly concluded that Denis also had been frightened at last.

To fully appreciate the terror inspired by such simple methods, we must remember the superstitions of those days and the firm belief of all classes of society in the powers of magicians. The very coarseness and brutality of manners, produced by constant warfare in daylight, aided, on account of the ignorance by which it was accompanied, in making the haughty barons slaves to the most abject superstition in the dark.

As for St. Pol, he hesitated no more, but, holding up the cross of his sword before him, began to repeat his Pater-nosters with fervent zeal, the sweat running down his back all the while.

Then came again from the black darkness a

voice, but another one this time—a man's—saying:

"Gaston de Coucy, repent and restore to the widow, or worse betide thee."

Again there was a deep groan, followed by the broken tones of Gaston, sobbing:

"I will, I will. Forgive me."

"Forgiveness is for repentance, and thou hast not repented," said the deep voice.

"But I will, I will," sobbed the affrighted Master of Coucy, his teeth chattering in his head.

"Is this repentance?" demanded the voice, and instantly a red glare filled the hall, in the midst of which the figure of Jacques Marcel, pale and bloody, made its appearance, close to De Coucy, so close that the proud knight recoiled instinctively and put out his hands to ward it off. Marcel on his part, if it were he and not an apparition, made no movement, and the next moment the glare vanished.

But St. Pol, in the brief interval during which it lasted, had made several discoveries which reassured him somewhat. He saw that the upper part of the hall was full of smoke, which had probably been one cause of the intense darkness, that Gaston and Denis were quite overcome with terror, and that George of Antioch and his page were standing not ten feet from the cowering men, regarding them attentively. Furthermore, he noticed a small censer standing on the ground near Gaston, from which still streamed up the white smoke in which the head of Guy had appeared.

Then the darkness covered all again, but St. Pol caught a ray of the moon, piercing the smoke from one of the windows. He heard the voice of Gaston trembling, as he said:

"I will repent, indeed I will."

"Then swear to leave this place and return as thou camest," was the answer of the voice.

"I swear it on the Holy Evangelists," cried Gaston, eagerly.

Instantly there was a loud crash in the room, as of thunder, and still another voice, deep and powerful, shouted:

"Record the oath!"

St. Pol shuddered in spite of himself at the silence which ensued, apparently entire and unbroken. Then he noticed that the moonbeams were again coming in through the windows as the black smoke cleared away, and on a sudden the great door flew open at the end of the hall and a fresh gust of wind rushed in, driving the smoke before it.

Full of relief at the sudden entrance of light, the count ran to the door and out into the courtyard, shouting to his soldiers to bring lights.

He found the men clustered in groups, almost as full of fear as he had been, for they, too, had heard some of the strange noises in the hall, and had jumped to the conclusion that magic was going on.

With a dozen torches the entrance to the hall was no longer such an object of dread, and St. Pol made bold to penetrate the smoke once more. He found it much less dense, and as soon as the windows were opened it vanished rapidly, but he soon became satisfied of one thing—that the hall was empty of George of Antioch and all his belongings, the censer included, while Gaston de Coucy and Denis Morbec, stout men though they were, had both swooned away on the floor from excess of superstitious terror.

This by no means surprised the count, who felt that, had he been subjected to the same strain of mind as that which appeared to have been exercised on Gaston, he might have succumbed thereto.

He even began to experience a revulsion of feeling toward Gaston, as of one subjected to magic arts, and to hope that he might be soon rid of the presence of George of Antioch, whom he began to suspect of being a Saracen in disguise.

"For what Christian would dabble in such unholy mysteries?" he concluded to himself. "Would I had never seen his black face!"

The retainers, at his orders, carried the two insensible men to the courtyard, where they speedily revived, and where Gaston jumped up in a frenzy of nervous terror, as soon as he saw where he was, crying:

"Let me out! Away from this accursed place! Satan inhabits it."

He ran to the gate, where he of course found the portcullis down and the drawbridge up, and there his terror began again as he looked through the bars and saw his followers waiting outside. In his confusion he shouted to them to rescue him, and they, taking it as a signal for assault, forthwith let fly a volley of arrows at the battlements.

Had it not been for the coolness and good-nature of St. Pol, who saw the mistake and understood his guest's terror, a regular siege would now have been begun, but the stout master of the castle exerted his stentorian voice to its full extent, roaring:

"Shoot not a bolt, ye fools, or I slay De Coucy on the spot."

This thundering threat penetrated the dazed mind of Gaston himself, and he turned to St. Pol with an abject mien, begging him to let him go and remember his knightly word.

"Fore Heaven, if I did not, thou wouldst be

a dead man, now," retorted St. Pol, angrily. "Order thy knaves back, that I may lower the bridge. Dost think us all fools in this place, to expose ourselves to a sudden rush by your men with the gate open? Order them back, I say."

And not until the whole of the glacis was cleared of assailants did the count permit the portcullis to be raised and the drawbridge let down, after which De Coucy and his discomfited squire, looking as dejected as they had been proud when they entered, walked over to their men, as the bridge swung up to its position of safety.

Once more St. Pol ascended to the gate tower and watched in silence the departure of the whole of De Coucy's cavalcade, which speedily disappeared, taking with it the pack of hounds.

Then he suddenly remembered his guest, George of Antioch, with a feeling of uneasiness, and at the same time with a sense that he ought to inquire after the minstrel's comfort.

So thinking, he descended to the court, ordered the garrison to disperse to their beds except an ordinary guard, and betook himself to the great hall which was once more lighted up.

To his surprise no one was to be found there, and further inquiry developed the fact that no one had either seen George of Antioch, his page nor his servant, since their entrance into the hall.

Where they had gone no one in the castle seemed to know, and the count of St. Pol, after a careful and thorough search for the men, sent to the stables to find if their horses were there.

Still more to the amazement of everybody, these two had vanished, though no one had seen either the minstrel or any of his men enter the stables.

Then at once the superstition of St. Pol's retainers, already excited by the mysterious events in the hall, found free vent for itself in the whisper which circled from lip to lip that the stranger was a magician, who had been carried off by evil spirits as soon as his work was done.

The peculiar manner of his coming, after a thunder-storm, the flaming nature of his colors, the way in which he had been chased by Gaston de Coucy, and the abject terror to which he had evidently reduced that haughty noble, all combined to strengthen this impression.

The only comfort that seemed to remain to the retainers of St. Pol was the fact that the magician was gone, and they dispersed to their couches, some of them to lie and quake till morning, when daylight might dispel their terrors.

As for the Count St. Pol, as soon as he heard that the horses were gone, he fell into a fit of deep thought, which lasted till the seneschal came to light him to bed.

He waited in his own chamber till the household was quiet, when he went to the fireplace and opened a secret door, which gave entrance to a passage known to no one in St. Pol but himself. In the thick dust on the floor of the passage were the marks of recent footsteps, not his.

CHAPTER IV.

ADELIN.

DE COUCY CASTLE was a vast building, or rather assemblage of buildings, capable of accommodating more than a thousand people under its spacious coverings. There was an outer court and an inner one, a tilt-yard and tennis-court, all surrounded with lofty ramparts twenty or thirty feet thick, faced with round towers. It was such a grand establishment as required enormous wealth to maintain, and in good truth the riches of the Master of Coucy were greater than those of any single noble in France, save the royal dukes.

In the heart of all this nest of buildings towered the great keep or citadel, the residence of the owner himself, within which was the hall common to all feudal castles where all the privileged followers of the chief ate in common at one table.

Here it was that, on the morning after the visit of Gaston de Coucy to St. Pol, the Lady Adeline de Coucy and her bower-maid, Arlette Marcel, were at breakfast, almost alone in the vast hall.

When we say at breakfast, we refer properly only to the lady, on whom the maid waited, standing behind her chair; but mistress and maid were on too familiar footing, through long and faithful service on one side and attachment on the other, to observe much formality except before strangers; and they were conversing with much interest.

The Lady Adeline de Coucy was one of those soft, serious-looking women, with pale, regular faces, dark-blue eyes and brown hair, from whom one expects a low sweet voice, which indeed, she possessed. She was still, six years after the arrival of the news that she was a widow, dressed in deep mourning, with a black veil sweeping to her feet.

Arlette was a vivacious, black-eyed, Gipsy-faced Provençale, with a strong likeness in her bold, resolute face and manner to her brother, "Jacques the Poacher," as he was called.

Besides these two, who were at the high table on the dais, under the canopy, there was only

one other person in the hall, an old man wrapped in a long gown of scarlet cloth, bordered with fur, and wearing on his head the square furred "cap of maintenance," as it was called, which announced him to be of noble blood, and a relative of the house.

Outside of the hall, the rest of the castle seemed to be just as much deserted, only one or two sentries pacing the top of the battlements, and it was on this unwonted loneliness that the Lady Adeline was commenting.

"Where have all the men gone?"

"Oh, my lady," said Arlette, eagerly, as if bursting to tell her news, and yet with a sob in her voice, "no one knows what has become of them, since they started after poor Jacques."

Adeline de Coucy started slightly.

"Jacques! Who? Not thy brother?"

"Oh, yes, my lady, for ever since the day we had the news of Lord Guy's death, Jacques has been wild, and they tell me he was caught poaching yesterday and that the Master ordered him hanged."

"But what has that to do with this midnight expedition?" asked the lady, in some wonder.

"Oh, my lady, they say that Jacques escaped, just as the storm broke out, aided by a strange Saracen wizard, who came from no one knows where."

Again Adeline started, this time more perceptibly.

"A Saracen! From whence? Perhaps he might know—"

Her voice died away inarticulately, and Arlette regarded her with a grave pity that seldom left her.

The girl knew that her mistress had never given up the hope that her husband might be alive, and that she was eager to question every pilgrim from the Holy Land, whereas Arlette herself had no faith in any such visions.

"How can he be alive when the heathens cut off his head?" she reasoned with much justice.

But, nevertheless, she answered her mistress's unspoken thought cheerfully:

"The men heard him disputing with the Master, and saying that he came from Godfrey, King of Jerusalem, but they think him a wizard."

"And why?"

"Because of the way in which he openly defied the Master, when he had not so much as a man-at-arms to back him, and because he made the Master tremble."

Adeline looked at her and burst into a low, bitter laugh.

"He must be a wizard indeed to make him tremble, for he is used to lord it wherever there is a woman or a slave to be cowed. Well, girl, what happened next?"

"Then, my lady, the Saracen cut down the Master's horse, and the storm came down on them all with a crash, driving Master and men to the castle, while poor Jacques and the Saracens went away with the storm and were heard of no more."

"And is that all?"

"Not all, my lady. Squire Denis and the Master were taken together during the storm, and as soon as it was over they sallied out, took every man they could find, and went away into the night with hounds on Jacques's trail."

"And are they not back yet?"

"No, my lady."

Adeline de Coucy mused a little while, and then suddenly seemed to take a resolution, for she turned to Arlette and asked her:

"Canst thou find thy brother and this Saracen, Arlette?"

"I cannot say now, my lady. It is like that my brother will seek me out at last."

"I must have speech with this Saracen, Arlette. He knows something of my lord's fate or he could not frighten Gaston de Coucy. Tell thy brother it must be so."

"Yes, my lady."

And then further speech was cut short by the sound of the long-expected trumpet which announced the return of De Coucy's midnight expedition.

Adeline hurriedly retired from the dais, where she seldom came, so great was her horror of meeting Gaston de Coucy, and left the back of the hall by a small door which opened on a passage ending in a flight of steps leading to the turret she habitually occupied.

From one of the windows of her room she looked down into the castle yard and beheld the men-at-arms trooping in, weary and muddy; while Gaston de Coucy and Denis seemed to be much cast down in spirit, for they remained on horseback, near together, for some time, neither speaking to the other but apparently lost in thought.

"They have not found thy brother, at all events," said the lady, as she looked down: "or methinks he would be there as a prisoner. Go down and see what has happened, Arlette."

"Yes, my lady."

And poor Arlette, who was naturally dying with curiosity and anxiety to hear what had become of her reckless brother, was only too glad to obey.

She ran down-stairs and soon found herself in the court-yard among the retainers, with whom she was a great favorite. Arlette had been

brought up at the castle since infancy, her mother having been foster-mother of Guy de Coucy, while her brother Jacques had been huntsman for the castle in the old days. Since the return of the Crusaders, however, poor Jacques had been in disgrace, as seemed to be the case with every one of whom Guy de Coucy had been fond. Gaston appeared to be imbued with a devil of spite that led him to persecute every adherent of the old Master of Coucy, and speedily dismissed Jacques from his post of huntsman, driving him to field work, which Marcel hated.

It was not to be wondered at that the young peasant, always bred up as a huntsman, should take to poaching, which he very soon did, and in which he had at last come to grief.

It did not take Arlette long to gather from the retainers the story of their expedition of the night before, and of its sudden and mysterious ending. None of them had been in St. Pol's castle, therefore they knew nothing positive as to what had happened in its recesses, but whispers of magic had gone round, and more than one who had been at Jerusalem was willing to swear that he believed a Saracen magician to be roaming the country, who had bewitched their master. The bold words of George of Antioch to Gaston had not fallen on deaf ears, and the name of Bou Sheer was well known to Crusaders. The mention of the "thousand marks for which you sold your cousin," had started the theory that the Master of Coucy had sold his soul to the Evil One, who was come in the person of the Syrian minstrel to claim his bargain.

All these rumors, and much more, Arlette gathered up to take to her mistress, and then returned to the hall, through which she had to pass to reach the turret stairs.

She found it full of men, eating ravenously, for they had been out all night. She saw the Master of Coucy and Squire Denis on the dais at one table, eating together, a most unusual circumstance, as it was the squire's place to wait on his master.

As Arlette passed the great fireplace, on her way up, she noticed the old knight who had been sitting there before the men came in, still in the same place, but listening to the tales they were telling with an appearance of great interest.

The old knight was Sir Baldwin de Coucy, a distant cousin of the old and new Masters of Coucy, whose office of Castellan, or Governor of the Castle, was one which had gradually fallen into the hands of Denis, owing to the age and infirmities of the old warrior. Like all old men, he was fond of gossip, and the men were always willing to indulge him on account of his rank.

As the bower-maid passed him, old Baldwin looked up and made her a signal which the quick-witted girl understood to mean that he wished to tell her something in secret. She nodded in reply to the signal, for she and old Baldwin were used to hold secret consultations, and then she passed on to the dais.

Gaston and Denis, surly and gruff as usual, only a little more so, looked at her as she went toward the door, and Gaston suddenly growled out:

"Where is thy mistress?"

"In her chamber, my lord," answered the girl, somewhat frightened at the abruptness of the question.

"Tell her to come down; I would see her at once!" was the surly rejoinder, accompanied by a gloomy frown, though Arlette remarked that somehow her master's eyes did not meet her own.

Squire Denis, who sat with his elbows leaning on the table, favored her with an impudent leer at this moment, and Arlette somewhat pertly answered:

"I will tell her. Whether she come or not, is another question."

Instantly the overbearing Master of Coucy was up and frowning in good earnest.

"Tell her that if she comes not I will come myself and force the door. Begone, saucy wench."

The angry Master snatched up the hunting-whip from the table and made a furious blow at Arlette, which the girl only escaped by running out as fast as she could.

In those days there was little respect for peasant girls on the part of feudal lords, though chivalry was fast civilizing the roughest ones.

No sooner was Arlette gone than Gaston resumed his gloomy attitude, and remarked to Denis:

"It's well enough to threaten, but how if she refuse to marry me, as she has, ere this?"

"Then," answered the squire, boldly, "I would name the day, take her to the altar and make her marry me by force."

"But no priest would marry us," urged Gaston, in a hesitating tone.

"I will find one that will," answered Denis, scornfully; "a fellow who will pronounce you man and wife while the bride is screaming with fits in the chancel, and register the marriage for a good broad piece of gold, any day in the week."

Gaston looked suspicious.

"Is he a real priest?"

"Nay; he has not been unfrocked yet," replied the squire. "But real or pretended, he can marry you to her, and it is about time that the job was done."

"Why?" asked Gaston, in the same gloomy tone that had marked him from the beginning of the interview.

"Because—mark me well—because if you do not, this Syrian magician will do you some deadly hurt. He has found out from Bou Sheer something about the compact in the valley of Kedron, and he will, as he has threatened, take it to the king."

"Well? Marrying her will not prevent that."

"How do you know that?" asked the squire, keenly. "On the contrary, it may do it, since to hurt you then will be to hurt De Coucy's widow, for whom this fellow seems to have some strange tenderness."

Gaston mused awhile.

"Who is it, think you?"

"I think it may be Bou Sheer himself, disguised as a Christian. These Saracen hounds have learned our language, some of them from prisoners. He is angry because we cheated him out of the thousand marks, and has resolved on trying to get more."

"Why should we not offer him a thousand marks now, and so get rid of him?" queried Gaston, in the uneasy tone and manner which had marked him all through the interview.

Denis stared at his superior in manifest surprise and contempt.

"Offer him a thousand marks, truly? He would laugh at us and demand ten. That man never came here for a thousand marks. We shall hear of him again at Orleans, at the Field of Honor, or I much mistake me."

The squire referred to a grand joust or tournament, lately proclaimed for the city of Orleans, and at which the King of France was expected to be present.

Gaston started at the mention of the name.

"The Field of Honor! He will never dare to come there! Why, we can sweep him from the face of the earth with our retainers."

"Then let us go there and take the Lady Adeline with us as the Dame de Coucy," suggested the squire, with his usual astuteness.

"Good!" was the satisfied comment of his lord, who seemed so much relieved by the idea that he forgot all about the summons he had sent to Adeline, till the squire called his attention to the fact that she had not obeyed it.

At the moment that he did so, Adeline herself in her own room was reading a small note just handed her by her bower-maid.

It seemed that Arlette, besides gathering up all the news possible from the men-at-arms in the hall, had been to see old Baldwin, who had given her this remarkable document. It ran thus:

"If Adeline de Coucy is still faithful to her dead lord, let her press the upper left hand corner of the fourth stone from the left side of the fireplace in the small chamber at the foot of the donjon turret, and follow the steps wherever they lead to-night."

GEORGE OF ANTIOCH.

"How did he get this?" asked Adeline, wonderingly, and Arlette could give no explanation beyond the fact that Sir Baldwin had been away in the night, looking for the absent defenders of the castle. It seemed probable that George of Antioch and he had met while the old knight was away.

And now came the question what to do about obeying Gaston's summons to descend. Adeline had been so long subjected to persecutions that she realized the meaning of the summons, and had almost determined to disobey it, when the memory of Gaston's brutal threat overcame her, and she determined to descend if only to gain time.

As she had anticipated, the offer or rather command of marriage was made, and as firmly refused by her, when Gaston cut matters short by ordering her to prepare to marry him the next day and to accompany him on the third to the great tournament of Orleans.

For all answer Adeline left the hall.

CHAPTER V.

THE PASSAGE.

NIGHT once more closed over the towers and walls of Coucy, and the whole household was buried in sleep, for all were tired out after the previous night's expedition.

All except Adeline and Arlette, who were now reaping the reward of regular slumbers, being broad awake and ready to go anywhere.

They did not have to wait long that night for peace and quiet, for the retainers were soon snoring in chorus all over the castle, and it would have taken much heavier steps than those of the two girls to disturb them.

Besides this, the chamber in which they were to search for the mysterious passage was in the basement of the corner turret of the donjon, separated from the rest of the building by thick walls, and occupied by winding staircases and small chambers, used as armories.

The room to which the mysterious letter directed them was the lowest in the tower, and was intended as a store-room for quick-lime and Greek-fire; of which, however, only two barrels remained.

There was a heavy dull odor about the room anything but agreeable, on account of the lime and naphtha, but this did not deter the two girls from their search.

Just about an hour before midnight, when all was in repose, they stole from the turret chamber in which Adeline had been half-lodged, half-confined ever since the Crusade closed.

Both carried lamps of the fashion of those early days, with their floating wicks and smoky flames, and both trod softly, looked apprehensively round at every step, and listened to every noise that happened in the dark stillness. The tiny squeak of a mouse made necessary a halt of several seconds, and the scamper of the same mouse over the stone floor frightened both nearly out of their senses.

At last, however, without any serious mishap, they arrived at the musty old lime magazine, and entered it.

Before going any further, Arlette, who was always the coolest of the two, closed the outside door of this room and drew the heavy bolts, so that they were quite secure from interruption from the outside, even were any one disposed to follow them, which was not likely. No one had seen them go there, and the lime-room was never used except in case of an imminent and formidable siege.

Once secure from observation, they began to explore the sides of the room for the secret door spoken of by George of Antioch.

"The upper left-hand corner of the fourth stone from the left of the fire-place," said Arlette, slowly.

Adeline, on her part, seemed to have forgotten that part of the letter, for she kept murmuring:

"If Adeline de Coucy is faithful to her dead lord? Oh, canst thou doubt it, Guy, my knight, my hero, my lord! How could I be false to thee? Where is there another like thee?"

The poor lady had one strange fancy which she nursed in spite of all opposition. She would not believe that her husband was dead. In vain had they told her of the finding of his headless corpse, and the disappearance of Squire Eustace; the poor lady had but one answer to make:

"His head was not found, and they would not have carried it off had he been dead."

She had been told again and again that the Saracens valued heads as trophies. Still she answered:

"Bring me his head and I will believe it. Not till then."

Not even Arlette shared her belief, though the girl had more reason to trust than her mistress, for she had loved Eustace, who had entirely disappeared since the storming.

Therefore it was only Adeline that seemed anxious to explore the secret passage, of which she had never heard till that day, and of which every one else in the castle, even Gaston, was apparently ignorant.

Arlette explored the wall of the room, finding the four great stones as the letter said. In the upper left hand corner of the fourth block was a smooth place, that seemed to have been chiseled on the rough face of the rest of the stone, and on this smooth place Arlette pressed with all her force. There was a whining groan as of rusty hinges, and the end of the block yielded and swung back, disclosing a deep black orifice in the wall, about six feet high and three feet across.

Adeline uttered a little cry and started back with a woman's instinctive terror as she saw this aperture, but Arlette held her lamp toward it to explore. A faint, cool breeze made the lamp-flame flutter back, nearly to extinction; but the light lasted long enough to reveal a gently sloping passage, winding down into the earth, and apparently hewn in the solid rock on which the castle was founded.

"Shall we enter, my lady?" asked Arlette, doubtfully.

Then a transformation seemed to take place in Adeline, hitherto the timid one of the pair.

"Enter? canst thou doubt it, when he bids?" she answered, and instantly swept in front of the bower-maid, and entered the dark passage.

Arlette followed more slowly, and the two girls proceeded down the narrow passage for some minutes in silence. Arlette, ever cautious, took care to push the revolving stone which valued the secret passage, back into its place, being rewarded by the discovery of an iron handle in the stone by which the door could be opened from inside the passage.

Closing this door at once stopped the draught up the passage and enabled the lamps to burn steadily, so they could see where they were going.

As they had anticipated, the passage was cut through the rock on which the castle was built, and in one place pierced the foundation, after which it entered the gravelly soil of the country round, and had to be supported by masonry.

In a short time they heard the sound of running water, mingling with the dull rattle of a mill-wheel, and Arlette exclaimed: "It is the mill-stream, madam. We are outside the moat and in the middle of the village."

But the Lady Adeline paid no heed to the intelligence, while she kept on muttering:

"If Adeline be faithful! Oh, who can doubt it?"

Arlette shook her head, and they soon passed the clattering of the mill, after which the passage began to rise toward the upper earth, and in a little while more they saw the pale light of the moon glimmering through the leaves of the forest ahead of them.

Then Adeline uttered a cry of eager delight and ran on to the foot of a flight of stone steps, up which she flew rather than climbed, emerging at last in the midst of a little glade in the woods, surrounded with matted underbrush.

In the midst of this glade stood the athletic figure of Jacques Marcel, Arlette's brother, no longer clad as a peasant, but wearing the armor and weapons of a crossbowman.

He bowed low as the lady came out into the moonshine, and said:

"The gracious lady has come. My master has not arrived yet. Will it please the gracious lady to follow me to the hermitage. My master will be there."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PAGE.

WALTER, Count of Toulouse, was out a-hunting on the day after Gaston de Coucy had chased the Syrian minstrel to St. Pol's Castle. Toulouse was the next neighbor and sworn friend of Hugh St. Pol, much of their liking arising from the fact that both had courted Adeline de Fayel in the old days when Guy de Coucy cut them out, and that both had turned irreclaimable bachelors in consequence of the disappointment.

The Count of Toulouse was in fact very nearly a counterpart of St. Pol, a little fatter and grayer, with an estate a little larger and a few more retainers, but otherwise the same good, jolly fellow, and as keen a huntsman as could be found in Provence or Languedoc.

The good count had been taking out his wolf-hounds for a run that morning. He was very proud of the breed of his dogs, and had been unusually lucky. He was therefore in a special good humor when he met his neighbor St. Pol, who had been indulging his powers in the opposite direction.

"Where hast thou been, Hugh?" he called out, noticing a fine pair of antlers in his neighbor's train.

"Faith, I took that deer off De Coucy's lands," returned St. Pol, as naturally as possible. "He brought his hounds to my castle gate last night, so I could do no less than give him a hunt in return."

Toulouse stared at the news and looked grave, making inquiries which finally brought out the story of the visit of the Syrian magician, as St. Pol called him.

Of course Toulouse crossed himself piously at this piece of news, and of course congratulated his comrade on his escape from the clutches of the Evil One.

Even while he was speaking, St. Pol's face assumed a comical expression, half fear and half shame at his own fear, as he looked up the road; for there, riding toward him, was the identical Syrian, George of Antioch, in his curious dress of scarlet and lemon yellow, followed by the same page who had been with him on the evening before. Besides the page, however, the sturdy form of Jacques Marcel, well mounted on one of the best horses in the stables of Coucy Castle, announced that the minstrel had increased his retinue.

Toulouse gazed open-mouthed at this apparition, which he saw for the first time, but the Syrian rode straight up as if he did not notice anything strange in their demeanor, and addressed St. Pol:

"My lord count, I have come to apologize for leaving your house so quickly last night without notice, but I had urgent business to attend to, which brooked no delay."

St. Pol flushed red as he bowed in acknowledgment of the explanation and muttered:

"The offense was mine to neglect my guest long enough to allow him to escape."

Then, as if a thought struck him, he added:

"How found you the passage of which you wot? I thought that was known only to myself and the dead."

For the first time the face of the Syrian exhibited a trace of color and confusion as he answered:

"We all have our secrets. Perhaps the dead told me, as you told the dead."

St. Pol gave an ill-tempered growl as he retorted:

"The dead never trusted me with his own secrets."

"Therein the dead kept his own for himself," responded George of Antioch, calmly. "What boots it to know the secrets of the dead, save to help the living? Are you gentlemen going to the Field of Honor at Orleans, or not?"

The transition was sudden, and Toulouse blurted out:

"Of course. Every knight in France worthy to be called a knight will be there."

"Which of you gentlemen, then, will lend me his armor and bearings, and allow me to go to Orleans in his stead?" asked the minstrel.

Toulouse burst into a roar of laughter at the idea, but St. Pol gravely observed:

"Let every man ride his own horse. I am going myself and need my armor."

The minstrel did not seem to be in the least abashed at the rebuff, for he merely responded:

"I hardly expected it of you, but the Count of Toulouse will, I think, do it for me."

"In good sooth, and on the faith of a Christian, I will do no such thing for any man," retorted Toulouse, in a positive tone.

"Then I shall take thine armor from thee and go in thy stead," was the astonishing reply of this quiet, smooth-spoken minstrel.

Toulouse was so utterly astounded that for a moment he could make no reply; and then, realizing that the Syrian was laughing at him, he got angry. In those days the blow generally preceded the word or came so close on it as to be indistinguishable. So it was with Toulouse. The honest count grew purple with indignation, drew his sword and spurred his heavy Norman horse at George of Antioch.

The minstrel, on his part, not only did not try to defend himself, but actually laughed as he wheeled his Arabian and galloped away.

In a moment both counts and their retinues, catching the infection, and shouting: "Down with the wizard!" dashed after him.

The three parties were so close together when the Syrian minstrel uttered his careless defiance that the page of George of Antioch was almost in St. Pol's grasp when they started, and that veteran warrior, striking spurs to his horse of a sudden, clutched at the boy's long black curls and caught him before the bay pony had taken fright.

The rough way in which the old warrior dragged the page back, called forth a scream of pain in such a shrill tone that St. Pol, after one look at his prisoner, uttered an oath of amazement, ejaculating:

"A woman, by St. Peter's beard!"

He did not join in the pursuit, but remained behind, holding the page, who indeed seemed to be a girl, and one of great beauty, with dark, lustrous eyes, and an oval, brown face of decidedly Gipsy character.

The prisoner seemed to be greatly terrified and poured forth a stream of supplications in a foreign tongue, that the count, having been a Crusader, recognized as Arabic, though he understood hardly a word.

He looked up the road and saw that the fleet-footed Eastern steed of George of Antioch had already distanced the heavy war-horses ridden by Toulouse and his party. He resolved, therefore, to hold on to his prisoner as a hostage, and proceeded to tie her arms behind her, using her belt for the purpose.

While not a bad-natured man, he had been too long a soldier not to be hardened against the supplications of prisoners, however beautiful; and when Toulouse came back, with his horse sweating and blowing, he turned over the girl to his comrade with strict injunctions to keep her a prisoner.

"And why not in St. Pol's?" queried the honest count, amazed.

"Because yonder wizard knows a secret too much about St. Pol," answered the count, with a grimace. "A passage of which even thou, my friend, knowest naught, was used by him last night to escape; and I could not sleep sound if I knew that he was coming after his light-o'-love in my castle."

Toulouse whistled.

"Oho! is that the case?" he said. "Well, an' he gets into my castle, he is no wizard, but the devil himself, for no man knows my secret passage but myself."

That night the mysterious page of George of Antioch was a close prisoner in Toulouse's castle.

Could Toulouse keep her? St. Pol wagered him ten nobles he could not.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTIVE PAGE.

WHEN Walter, Count of Toulouse, took his boy-girl prisoner, into his castle he felt quite secure as to her safe-keeping.

"St. Pol is a good deal of a fool," he observed to his seneschal. "He has let out the clew to the secret passage of his castle to some stranger and it has got abroad. 'Fore heaven, the man that enters my castle of Quiberon will have to be wiser than thou art to find my secret."

The seneschal smiled as in duty bound at his master's sarcasm, but for all that he felt very curious about the secret passage, which was part of the stock in trade of every feudal baron. Living as they did in constant warfare, no matter how strong their castles, they were always liable to a siege which should gradually capture outwork after outwork, till it came to the donjon itself. That lost, there was no hope of life for a medieval baron at the mercy of his foes, save in an escape by means of a secret passage, more or less artfully concealed, and ending in the outer air somewhere out of view from the castle. We have seen the secret passage of Coucy. St. Pol's began in the lord's bedchamber, opened into another in the rear of the stables, and finally led into the forest. Toulouse had another, made by the same workmen in the lifetime of his grandfather, and which he

fondly hoped to be a secret to all the world. He had never breathed it to his neighbor St. Pol, and the only person to whom he had confided it was his other neighbor of old times, Guy de Coucy, in the days when they had been bosom friends.

"And Guy de Coucy is dead and would never have told my secret to any one," he cogitated; "therefore I am safe."

He saw to the locking up of his young prisoner in a room next to his own, and gave strict orders to the sentries on the ramparts to watch for all people prowling near the castle, and to shoot them without warning.

It was a harsh thing to do, but Toulouse was a feudal baron with all the superstitions and cruelties of his day. He thought only that he had got into his hands the heathen mistress of a Moslem wizard, and he proposed to keep her as a bait to lure her lover into his power, with a view to kill him and terminate his sorceries.

The good count visited his prisoner the last thing before going to bed, and found the boy or girl, whichever it might be, sitting disconsolately on the edge of the bed, weeping bitterly.

This rather discomfited Toulouse, who was more tender-hearted than St. Pol, and he essayed the task of consolation.

He had not lodged his prisoner badly, and he had seen to it that she was provided with good food. The room she occupied had once been Toulouse's mother's, and was the most luxurious in the castle.

Nevertheless, the black-eyed girl-page would not be comforted, but sat crying bitterly, and only wept the more when Toulouse sat down beside her and put his arm round her waist to console her.

The jolly count was by no means insensible to female charms, even if he was the devotedly sentimental knight of Adeline de Coucy; and he began to talk to the girl in *Lingua Franca*, in the hope of making her understand him.

He asked her not to cry, but she only wept the more; and then he promised to let her go next day if she would only stop crying.

Instantly the artful creature proved that she understood him perfectly, by beginning to smile at him.

Toulouse, encouraged by his success, began to console a little more, becoming ardent and tender by turns, his prisoner seeming to become more and more reconciled to her fate.

Presently he remembered that it was late and all the castle asleep, and he attempted a little familiarity, by stealing a kiss.

Instantly the dark Gipsy girl in boy's clothes, lately so pliant, was transformed into a regular little leopardess, who sprung away from him and stood trembling with fury, with one hand half behind her grasping a dagger, the other clenched and quivering with passion. Toulouse, however, was used to fits of passion, and only laughed as he came toward her with outstretched arms, saying:

"Why so coy, my pretty pagan? I would not kill thee."

"Keep off or I kill!" hissed the girl, as he advanced; and then, with a sudden catlike bound, she sprung in on him and stabbed him twice in the shoulder.

So quick was the motion, so sudden the assault, that Toulouse felt the stabs before he knew what she was about. They were neither deep nor dangerous, but they irritated the powerful warrior to that extent that he rushed in, wrenched the dagger from the slender fingers of the girl, whom he clutched as if he were about to wrestle with a bear, with such force that her ribs bent under the pressure, and she screamed out with the pain.

The next moment the door was thrown open, and into the room rushed George of Antioch and Jacques Marcel, the latter of whom brought his long staff down on the head of the Master of the castle with such force that Toulouse dropped senseless, like a stricken ox.

With a glad sobbing cry of relief, the girl sprung to meet the Syrian minstrel, who folded her in his arms and asked anxiously in Arabic: "Did the villain hurt thee, Zuleika?"

"Not much yet: but, oh, if you had not come!" she sighed.

"Well, I am glad he harmed thee not," replied George of Antioch, in a grave tone, "for the man was once a good man."

Then, turning to Jacques Marcel, he continued:

"Is he badly hurt?"

"He will get over it before long," responded the ex-poacher, dryly. "His head is thick."

In fact, Toulouse was beginning to make a stir already, and the minstrel saw that something had to be done to keep him quiet. As he looked around in some doubt, the quick wits of the girl solved the problem, for she whispered, with fun gleaming in her eyes:

"Lock him in where I was, and they will think he is Zuleika."

"A good thought," assented George of Antioch. "Out of the room, quick, and wait in the passage."

A moment later he had the satisfaction of turning the key on the count, leaving him of a certainty safe for the night. To make assurance doubly sure, he pulled out the key and took it

with them, after which he walked straight into the luxurious room of the Master of the castle himself.

"And how did you get here?" asked the girl, as if she suddenly began to realize the astonishing nature of his appearance.

George of Antioch smiled, and pointed to an open doorway in the back of the huge, old-fashioned fire-place.

It was the last place where one would have looked for a door, for a wood-fire was burning in front of it, the smoke rolling into the passage as much as up the chimney.

"I know every castle in this neighborhood, Zuleika," he said; "and ere we have done with these people we will astonish some more of them. Come, we have work on hand to-night. Let us go."

As he spoke he signed to her to enter the secret passage, and the girl, without any hesitation, sprung over the burning logs and went on into the smoky cavity. Already they could hear Toulouse shouting in the next room at the top of his voice, though the tones sounded dull and muffled through the heavy stone walls of the castle.

George of Antioch went to the door of the Master's room, quietly drew the bolts and turned the clumsy key in the lock, then entered the secret passage with Jacques Marcel, carrying with him all the keys of Toulouse's castle, which lay in a bunch on the table of the lord's chamber, where the seneschal had laid them before leaving his master for the night.

"They will have rare sport in the morning," quoth George of Antioch, with a laugh, as he entered the secret passage and swung to the stone door behind him.

Like all such passages, there were means provided on the inside by which it could be securely bolted in case of a sudden flight from enemies in the castle, and the Syrian swung the heavy iron bars into place with a satisfaction that told of his previous anxiety.

Then the three felt their way on down a dark, smooth passage without a light, George of Antioch seeming to be perfectly familiar with the locality, and finally emerged in a shaft going straight up into the sky, round and smooth like a well.

While Zuleika was hesitating, as if undecided what to do, the Syrian minstrel pointed out a flight of steps cut in the side of the well, and winding round and round spirally to the top, but entirely concealed from view from above, on account of the overhanging ceiling, which converted the stairway into a gallery.

Up these stairs they went till they came to the top and found that the well ended in a roofless chapel, that had probably belonged to a hermitage, on account of its solitary situation.

When they emerged the Syrian and Jacques Marcel pulled a heavy stone slab that lay by the mouth of the well into its place, and all traces of the secret way of Quiberon had vanished.

"There," said George of Antioch, "is the best secret passage in all Provence, and foul fall the man that would betray it to a foe of Toulouse. Bring up the horses, Marcel."

The miller's son silently obeyed, and Zuleika beheld her own bay pony, which she had thought safe in Toulouse's castle, awaiting her.

The Syrian laughed when she questioned him as to the method by which the animal had been recaptured, and replied:

"We must not tell all our secrets at once, even to thee."

The girl seemed to be perfectly under his control, for she asked no more, though evidently anxious, and they got to horse and rode away through the woods till they came to the broad, smooth road leading from Marseilles past Quiberon, St. Pol, and Coucy, to Orleans.

This road was one of the relics of Roman times, for the feudal barons never made roads, and allowed those that they found to fall to ruin.

As they galloped away the Syrian looked up at the lofty towers of Quiberon and laughed.

"My friend Walter, of Toulouse, will be late at the Field of Honor, or I mistake me much," he said. "I can masquerade for a day under his name, after all."

Then they rode away, passing St. Pol, where all the household left behind was asleep, and in another hour came in sight of the ramparts and towers of Coucy. When nearly under the castle, George of Antioch turned away sharply to the left, skirting the village, and plunged into the woods in which the secret passage ended. It was the night which he had appointed for the meeting with Adeline de Coucy, and he knew that the hour was nigh at hand, for the moon was rising.

But it seemed that, as he drew nearer to the meeting-place, he seemed more unwilling to proceed; for he checked the pace of his horse to a walk, and his mien, lately so confident and full of fire, became downcast and gloomy. At last he halted and spoke to Marcel in a low, smothered tone:

"Go on; I cannot. Tell her I will be there anon."

Jacques Marcel cast a look of some surprise on the minstrel, but merely bowed and went

forward to the interview with Adeline, which we have already mentioned.

George of Antioch, left behind with the Arab girl in the woods, seemed to be overcome with some strange emotion. He dropped the reins on his horse's neck, covered his face with his hands and remained silent for some moments. Then the girl, who was watching him intently, heard him murmur some broken words of French that she did not understand, while convulsive sobs agitated his whole frame.

With an impulse she could not resist, the girl—she was little more than a child in years—put her little brown hand on his arm, and softly whispered:

"Is my lord sad? Let Zuleika know the cause and she will weep with him. The tears of two end in the smiles of one."

George of Antioch turned and looked at her with a peculiar sad smile on his noble face.

"Child," he said, "I had no right to mourn before thee, but I come to a parting in the roads of life. One way lies dishonor and vengeance, the other lies peace after a battle. I am afraid, like the exile who has not seen his home for many years, to find what changes have come."

"Home!" repeated Zuleika, with an equally sad intonation. "And have not I also lost my home? Shall I ever see the blue star-flower of the desert again or the tents of my people? Yet I mourn not while thou art here."

The gentle reproach seemed to recall the Syrian to his senses, and he took up his reins as he said:

"Thou art right. Whatever fate hath in store for us, let us accept and give thanks to the Giver of Mercies."

Then he went forward to the interview which he seemed to dread so much, followed by Zuleika.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE BRIDAL.

GASTON DE COUCY rose early on the morning after his resolve to marry Adeline whether she would or no, and called for his squire Denis, who came at the summons, promptly enough.

"Go, get thy priest, Denis," said the Master of Coucy, resolutely. "Put him into the church, then get the lady, and we will finish this business; for I have determined to send thee to Orleans at once to take lodgings, before the town be full."

"Spoken like the Master of Coucy," answered Denis, heartily. "Now we shall be safe, despite all the Syrian magicians in the world. I will about it straight."

He left the room; and the Master slowly rose, attired himself in his best and descended to breakfast in a particularly good temper—for him.

While engaged in that meal, he sent word to the Lady Adeline that he wished to see her, and received word from the servant that the lady was still asleep and that her bower-maid said she was not to be disturbed.

"Very well," said Gaston, with a disagreeable smile. "Tell the girl that if she will not come to breakfast, she must come to church fasting. We ride to the wedding at noon."

Then he turned to his food with a relish, tossed off a goblet of Burgundy wine to keep up his spirits, and soon after was greeted by the arrival of Denis.

The squire informed him that all was ready, the priest in the church, and that he would read the service and pronounce the two man and wife, no matter what objections the lady might interpose.

The squire suggested, therefore, that the sooner the job was finished the better it would be, to which Gaston readily assented by dispatching another message for Adeline.

Denis, fully expecting resistance, had got together twenty of the most unscrupulous ruffians on the estate, who were to bring down the bride by force, if necessary; surround her on the road so that her cries might not be heard; and guard the doors of the village church to keep out inconvenient spectators.

It was therefore with some disappointment that he heard the messenger say that my lady would be down in a little while, that she was ready to go to church and be married under protest, that she only stipulated to be allowed to wear her widow's veil to the altar and to retain it undisturbed for three days after the wedding, until they departed for the Field of Honor at Orleans.

Gaston, overjoyed at this unexpected success, eagerly consented, and Denis triumphantly observed:

"My lord sees that all women love to be forced to do a man's will at the last moment. I can go on to Orleans now."

"The quicker the better," said Gaston; and the squire saddled up and departed for Orleans, with a large party of retainers, just as the lady Adeline, thickly veiled and clothed in black from top to toe, made her appearance in the hall, attended by Arlette.

Gaston started and made a strong grimace of disgust at the lugubrious figure before him.

"A sad-looking bride!" he exclaimed.

"What would you have?" answered Arlette,

somewhat bitterly. "She is ready for the sacrifice, but she cannot say she loves it. Take the sweet and sour together, and give thanks."

There was something in the bower-maid's philosophy that suited Gaston, the more so as Denis was not near him to set him into another bad temper.

Therefore, he only bowed to the silent figure in black, for the lady seemed resolved to utter no word; and the whole party set out for the church.

Arlette and her mistress, in the fashion of the day, rode on pillions behind two of the Master's retainers, and no accident happened on the way.

The church was a venerable gray stone edifice of the times of Charlemagne, and the priest, as Denis had said, was in waiting. Gaston recognized in him one Friar Ambrose, a monk who had been placed under suspension for immoral conduct a year before, but who had been restored by his bishop at the intercession of the Master of Coucy.

He knew therefore that Ambrose would do anything he was ordered, and it proved correct.

The priest rapidly ran over the beginning of the service till he came to the questions, which were responded to readily by Gaston. Those addressed to the lady were totally ignored by the silent figure in black, who stood before the altar like a statue.

Nevertheless, the responses came in due form; for one of the men-at-arms, at a signal from Gaston, made them as boldly as if he had been at the business all his life, and the priest went on with the service as if nothing unusual was happening, till he had formally pronounced the blessing on a new-married couple and the farce was over.

Then Arlette swiftly interposed between her mistress and Gaston, who seemed inclined to salute the bride, and said, warningly, in a low tone:

"Your promise, my lord, your promise. For three days she is to be left alone to mourn. On the fourth she is yours."

Gaston looked sulky and undecided, but again he yielded; the strong will of Denis not being near to support him in harshness.

Then Arlette and her mistress swept down the aisle before all the train, leaving the bridegroom looking foolish as he followed in the rear, and so got to horse and rode silently home.

Arrived at the castle, the quick-witted bower-maid gave no more chance for any infraction of the agreement than before, for she hurried her mistress away into the tower as Gaston was dismounting, and the servant who was sent after them discovered that the heavy iron-bound door that gave entrance to the whole tower was locked and bolted behind them.

This intelligence was, of course, highly irritating to the Master, who was, however, obliged to dissemble his anger to avoid looking ridiculous before the retainers, who were already tittering in secret.

He knew the tower door to be a strong one, designed against a siege, and he did not care to have it broken down on his own property, with the prospect of remedying it at considerable expense. He determined to wait till hunger should drive out his prisoners, then to snap them up and have his revenge. The only thing he had determined *not to do*, was to keep his promise. He went to dinner and drank deeply to drown his mortification, then went out into the tilt-yard, which commanded a view of the exterior of the tower, to watch for his game.

The lower part of this tower was provided only with loopholes for shooting, but near the top were several hanging windows projecting from the wall, and at one of these the Lady Adeline was tranquilly seated, looking down into the court and sewing at her broidery frame. Arlette was nowhere visible, and the angry knight was almost tempted to order the lower door forced, so tranquil did everything appear, when Adeline looked down into the court, smiled mockingly at him, and then turned and spoke to some one in the room.

Then, to Gaston's intense amazement, another female figure, *not that of Arlette*, looked down into the court, and the Master of Coucy saw a dark, rich face, with lustrous black eyes, smiling down at him with the same mocking mien.

"Who is that girl?" he bellowed, hoarse with anger, as he looked round at his vassals. "How came she in the castle? Who let her in?"

Instantly there was a commotion in the court as the news spread through the castle, and a crowd of men-at-arms was speedily gathered staring up at the window where the mysterious dark beauty was looking down on them.

She seemed entirely unaffected by the ordeal, for she looked down as complacently as if used to admiration and stares. But the retainers were completely wonder-stricken.

No one had ever seen this dark beauty before, and all were certain that if she entered the castle at all it must have been in the night and by treason.

None in the castle seemed to know of the existence of a hidden passage, for the secret was one only confided to the owner of Coucy and the heir of the castle. Guy de Coucy had known

it, and would probably have revealed it to Gaston had he thought of his cousin as next heir; but, expecting to have a son of his own to inherit the castle, he had told none but his old cousin Baldwin, who was known to be faithful to death.

How the secret had got into the hands of the Syrian minstrel was indeed a deep mystery, but of all this Gaston knew nothing. He only realized that a strange woman had got into the castle somehow, and he was furious at the way in which he had been deceived. In a great hurry he sent instantly for the captain of the guard, the seneschal, and all persons likely to know anything of the matter, and questioned them closely, but could get no satisfaction. None knew anything of it, and all the while the girl continued to lean her elbows on the sill of the lofty window and look down into the court below, smiling in the same provoking way.

The Lady Adeline had retired as soon as this girl came, and was no longer visible.

"You look like the Saracen Princess Aisha, that Renault of the Crest carried away from the old Emir Boabdil," observed one man shrewdly. "Seest thou not the gold coins on her forehead and neck, and the heathen rig of the Jezebel?"

It was indeed true that the dress of the girl, as far as seen, had a decidedly Oriental appearance, but all this gave no clue to her manner of entry into the castle, till some one suggested the calling of old Baldwin, who was accordingly sent for.

But then came a fresh surprise to the now thoroughly roused Master of Coucy.

Sir Baldwin de Coucy, an old man past seventy, who had been judged too infirm to attend to the duties of Castellan, had gone away from the castle, and on horseback, too.

Indeed, it soon transpired that the old knight had ridden away on the very night De Coucy chased the Syrian minstrel to St. Pol, had remained away till near dawn, and then had returned, as erect as a boy of twenty.

His little interview with Arlette had also not been wholly unobserved, for one of Gaston's pet spies had seen the old knight give the maid a letter, of the contents of which he professed ignorance.

And now Sir Baldwin had totally disappeared from the castle while the bridal party was at church, taking with him two sumpter horses, a spare charger, and his body-servant, Jean Marcel, brother of the escaped poacher, Jacques.

All these things coming together on Gaston, caused that worthy to foam at the mouth with indignation, and put an end to his hesitation about the tower.

He determined to force the door at all hazards, and gave orders to shoot arrows up at the windows.

"To frighten away that impudent heathen baggage," he said.

No sooner did the crossbowmen bring out their weapons to obey orders, than the Saracen girl waved her hand with a mocking laugh, and disappeared, leaving them to shoot at stone walls.

Meanwhile Gaston, full of fury, ordered a long beam of wood into the hall to batter at the tower-door, when he was met by the objection that said tower-door was at the end of a curving passage, so constructed that no battering-ram could possibly be brought to bear against it. The fact was that this corner tower was built expressly as a last resort for the defenders of the castle when all else was taken—a citadel within a citadel—and was absolutely impregnable to anything but a regular scientific assault. The very windows were not vulnerable, for they were too high to be reached save by a seventy foot ladder, and no support could be found for any such on account of the slanting pavement of the court below, designed for that purpose.

There was only one method which seemed feasible, and that was to assault the door with axes, which was accordingly done.

Hardly had the assault begun when a shower of dust of quicklime came into the faces of the pioneers from orifices in the walls especially designed for that purpose, and sent them out, blinded and tearing their flesh in desperation to ease the pain.

This plan clearly would not work, and Gaston determined to try starvation as a policy, the more readily that he had failed in everything else.

He left orders for a strict watch to be kept on the tower from within and without, and to shoot all intruders on the windows. Then he retired to sulk alone, wishing heartily for the active mind and resolute will of his squire, Denis, now on his way to the city of Orleans.

Thus irritated and grumbling to himself, he sat in his great chair in the hall, swigging off bumpers of Burgundy till he grew pretty drunk, and finally fell off into a helpless sleep.

Then the retainers of Coucy showed just how much respect they had for their master, when they found him asleep and when Denis was not near by to watch them. They knew from experience that the Master would not awake before morning, if not disturbed, and therefore

they set to work to clear the cellar of wine enough for a good debauch, in which guard-duty and everything else was soon forgotten.

When the beams of the morning sun shone in on Gaston's hall next day, they found him asleep in his chair before a table on the dais, over which were scattered the remains of a feast, while right in front of the knight himself stood his own dagger, stuck into the table and bearing a written scroll of parchment. His retainers were scattered over the floor in every state of drunken stupidity, and the sentries he had set over the tower door were fast asleep on their posts.

At last the Master of Coucy woke up with a snort and start to stare round him, and his first glance rested on the bright blade of his dagger, buried in the table.

There was something peculiarly savage in the aspect of this piece of bright steel, erect before him. It had evidently been driven into the table on which it stood with a force sufficient to have sent it to the hilt in a human body, and there it was, glittering viciously in the morning sun, as if warning him of the fate in store for himself.

There on the table, still plainer, cut in two by the dagger point, he beheld the words:

"Gaston the Traitor's heart, if he hurt Adeline de Coucy."
GEORGE OF ANTIOCH."

Gaston looked at these words in silence, sitting in his own castle; and his hair began to lift. All the superstitious terrors of the night in St. Pol rushed over him again.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIELD OF HONOR.

THE city of Orleans was gay with flags and tapestry, hanging from every window, while the streets were crowded with gay processions from dawn till dark. The Duke of Orleans, the king's nephew, had proclaimed a grand tournament for the 14th of July, 1106, in honor of the anniversary of the capture of Jerusalem; and every knight of prominence in France was expected to take part in it.

It was not known for certain, but it was expected that the king himself would be present toward the close of the festivities, which were to last three weeks, and it was announced for a fact that Peter the Hermit, to whose eloquence the success of the Crusade was largely owing, would preach every Sunday in the Cathedral, then newly erected.

The common people, who had but little pleasure in those times, were delighted with the prospect of the pageants and combats, and crowded into the city from all the country round. The thrifty citizens, who saw before them much profit in lodging strangers, sent their families into the fields to sleep in green booths, while they hung up notices of rooms to let, with as much forethought as that which actuates a modern seaside hotel-keeper in the busy season.

Already the town was overflowing with lodgers, and more were coming daily. The Field of Honor was a success from the beginning.

The huge written placards on the Cathedral doors that announced the tournament proclaimed that the first day would be given to the entries of the names of noble knights for the sports, after which there would be single combats daily for a week, only the victors in each trial being allowed to participate in the next week's contests.

The victors of the second week were to contend together on the third for final victory, and the man who overcame all others was to be crowned the "First Knight in France" by the hands of the most beautiful lady of the land.

For there was to be a contest in beauty, as well as valor, each knight having the privilege of naming the lady he thought excelled all others, and the method of settling the dispute as to the prize of beauty had the grand merit of simplicity.

The victorious knight was supposed to have the most beautiful lady, and any one who denied it was obliged to maintain his opinion at the point of the lance against him, at his own peril.

The only limit to the entries was in the rule that none could be admitted to the contest save those who had borne the Cross at some time.

The Count of St. Pol, jolly as ever, was one of the first arrivals in Orleans, with a handsome retinue. He had picked his best men and armed them completely, for he knew that in such a mixed assemblage as that of the Field of Honor, he might have to fight for his quarters if he went late.

Therefore he rode into Orleans early on the morning of the first day, and at once engaged a strong and capacious house in the center of the city, next to the Town Hall, or Hotel de Ville, at which the retinue of the Duke of Orleans was already domiciled. St. Pol was an old campaigner, and he took care that the house he selected should have few windows near the ground, and a strong door, for he had made up his mind to maintain his position against all comers, no matter what their rank.

The worthy knight, having selected his quar-

ters, after directing his men to keep armed at all points and guard the entrances, stable the horses and buy up all the provisions and forage available, unarmed himself, assumed his knight's robe, trimmed with fur, and set off for the Hotel de Ville to pay his duty to the duke, who received him with great cordiality and told him all about the programme for the week, and the feast set for the next evening. Having thus performed his duty to society the count set off on his return to his lodgings.

He was almost on the point of going in, when his attention was attracted by a disturbance in the street near by, crowded as it was with people. He saw the citizens running together to make a ring, heard the sound of angry voices followed by blows, and immediately beckoned to his men to follow him while he went forward to part the combatants.

The citizens scattered right and left before St. Pol's imposing figure, backed by the mail of twenty men-at-arms, and the court beheld a man in the dress of a pilgrim from Palestine, defending himself with his long staff against two others in the half-armor that showed them to be retainers of some noble house. Both carried swords and were persevering in their attacks; but the palmer, who seemed to be a man of great vigor, kept plying his long two-handed staff so well that neither of the men could strike him, while the resounding whacks of the staff showed that they themselves were getting hard blows every now and then.

"Hold your hands!" cried the count, sternly, and at the same minute several of his men-at-arms rushed in and ended the contest by main force, separating the stout palmer from his assailants.

"Who are ye?" continued St. Pol, addressing the two men, who, panting and perspiring, were dragged before him.

"We serve the Master of Coucy," was the sullen reply of one of the men. "Our lord will avenge us if we receive harm."

"And wherefore did ye attack this man?" asked St. Pol.

"He railed on the Master of Coucy and said he was no true knight," answered the same man.

"Is this true, Sir Palmer?" asked the count, and as he spoke he had time to observe more closely the figure of the stranger.

The coarse brown frock and broad hat of the pilgrim, his bare feet and the shock of long hair and beard that almost hid his face from view could not disguise the fact that he was a tall, handsome and well-made man. The length of hair and beard showed that he was probably under a vow not to cut them for some time, and the period of the vow could be judged of by the length of the beard, which already reached his waist.

The palmer looked curiously at St. Pol for a moment as the count asked the question, and then replied:

"It is not true."

"What!" almost screamed the angry serving-man. "Did you not say that the Master of Coucy was a coward, who flinched before the walls of Jerusalem?"

"No, dirty dog of an unclean master," was the disdainful reply of the bold palmer.

Both men lifted up their hands in such evident amazement that St. Pol saw there was something behind it all. Therefore he asked:

"What didst thou say, then?"

"Simple enough, my lord," replied the stout pilgrim. "I met these two men in the streets, wearing colors they had no right to, and I asked them whose men they were. They said they followed the Master of Coucy, and I told them that was not possible, I being his only servant now. I asked them their master's name; they said: 'Gaston de Coucy.' Then said I: 'Gaston de Coucy was a false coward, who sold the Master of Coucy to death at Jerusalem.' Then these two knaves set on me. That is all, my lord count."

St. Pol had listened to him like one stupefied, and blurted out:

"Who then, in the fiend's name, art thou?"

"I am Eustace, Squire to the only true Master of Coucy," was the answer. "I am seeking my master's head, to give it Christian burial."

CHAPTER X.

THE MAD PALMER.

No sooner did the Count of St. Pol hear that the bold palmer was none other than Eustace, the lost squire of De Coucy, than he became anxious to speak alone with him. Turning to the two serving-men who had been so earnest in their defense of Gaston's character, he asked them where was their master.

"At the castle, my lord," said one, civilly enough. "We came here, with Squire Denis, to get us lodgings for the Field of Honor."

"And have ye found them?"

"Ay, my lord. The squire hath engaged the house of Stephen the Tanner, next to the Hotel de Ville."

St. Pol turned crimson. It was the very mansion in which he himself was lodged.

"And since when did this most excellent

squire engage the house?" he asked, as soon as he could command his voice.

"Since an hour or more," replied the man, unsuspiciously. "The tanner told us that he had already let the house to a gentleman of our neighborhood, but Squire Denis would listen to nothing, save that the Master of Coucy must lodge next to the Duke of Orleans, or he would burn the house over the head of the gentleman and the tanner alike."

"Will he so indeed?" shouted the now thoroughly irate St. Pol. "Get you gone, impudent knaves, and tell your master's squire that if I, Hugh St. Pol, catch him around my lodgings, I will cut off his ears and fry them for supper. Away!"

It needed no second bidding to send the now thoroughly scared retainers running down the street, for they knew from the anger of St. Pol's voice and the looks of his men-at-arms that their lives were not worth a moment's purchase if they stayed where they were.

"Come with me, sir palmer," said the count, to Eustace, as soon as they had disappeared. "I would have speech with thee on matters of life and death, if thou art really Eustace."

"Pardon, my lord," answered the pilgrim, sadly. "I have a vow on me, which I have not broken for seven years. I may not enter a house, speak with a woman unless spoken to, nor eat any bread not begged, till the day I find my master's head to give it Christian burial."

"Then what dost thou here?" asked St. Pol, somewhat dryly. "If De Coucy's head be above ground it will not be here, but in Palestine."

In nowise disconcerted, Eustace replied:

"I break no vow while I wander, if I wander all my life through. If I never find it, at least I will not be forsworn."

"Then come into the court where the stables are," said the count, with a slight frown of vexation. "There is no roof over it, and I would question thee a while."

"I can do that, and welcome," was the grave reply of Eustace, as he followed the other into the open court in rear of the tanner's house, through the guarded gates.

St. Pol called for his seneschal and warned him that he might expect an attack any moment from the liegemen of the Master of Coucy, who were in strong force in the city. Then the doors of the house were closed, the gates of the stable-yard barred and bolted, and St. Pol saw that all his men were in position, ready to repel an attack, if any were made, which he only half-expected.

That done, he turned to Palmer Eustace, who had remained in the middle of the court-yard, leaning on his staff, patiently waiting for the better leisure of the nobleman.

"Thou sayest," began St. Pol, "that thou art Eustace, squire to Guy de Coucy. We all thought thee dead at Jerusalem. How camest thou out alive?"

"Simple enough," was the reply in a tone of indifference. "We were in the advance, my master and I, and had swept Bou Sheer and all his men from the ramparts when we heard a cry behind us, and saw that craven hound Gaston de Coucy and his Squire Denis, with all the men, deserting us and fleeing to the tower. Then my master bid me plant the banner in the ground, and we two fought as well as we could against the Saracens, who crowded yelling around us. We felt sure that we should be rescued by some of the other columns that we knew to be storming the city, so we fought on till our arms were wearied. Then we saw Bou Sheer himself heading a charge, and we were swept away in the onset, when I was struck down with a mace which left this mark."

And the palmer doffed his hat and showed St. Pol a great white scar where the thick locks that covered his head looked as if they had been shaved off a spot over an inch square.

"Well," said the count; "it does not seem to have killed thee. Did it stun thee long?"

"So long that it was sunset when I woke up and found myself stripped naked and covered with blood, in our own deserted camp, beside the dead body of my master, still in the armor he had worn that day, but headless, and lying in a pool of blood, with a Christian arrow—mark you, a Christian arrow—buried in his body up to the feathers."

"And what did you then?" asked St. Pol, much interested.

"I cannot tell, my lord. My head-wound seemed to confuse me, for I only remember kneeling by that headless body and swearing to wander the earth till I found my master's head to give it burial, and then I must have gone away, naked and unarmed as I was, into the wilderness, for I cannot remember anything for many years after."

As Eustace spoke he sighed heavily and passed his hand over his heavy matted curls, as if he still felt the sense of confusion and dizziness of those days.

"And what next?" asked St. Pol, again.

"When next I remember I was out in a forest fighting like a wild beast with nails and teeth against a leopard, while a dead deer lay between us," was the low, shuddering reply,

and St. Pol started and crossed himself piously.

"Holy Mother of Heaven, what a strait for a Christian to be in!"

Eustace sighed heavily.

"So it seemed to me, when I woke up as if from sleep and found the fierce brute tearing me. It had just clawed me over the top of the head and torn a great piece from the place where the mace had struck me, while my hands were at its throat. Then I prayed aloud to Mary Mother and her Son to help me, and that moment the strength of ten men seemed to come into me, for I strangled the leopard and dashed out its brains on a rock."

"Well done!" ejaculated St. Pol. "But go on. What next?"

"Then I was weak and wounded, but I sucked the blood of the leopard and remained in that place till my scratches were healed. They were soon well, for I must have been healthy then. But then first I began to think and remember and wonder where I was and what had become of my master's body, and then, too, I found that I was naked and hairy like a wild beast, and I was ashamed to show myself among men till I had made me a coat of skins."

"And how didst thou get away from there?" asked the count, now deeply interested.

"I wandered away to the west, guiding myself by the northern star as I had been wont to do, and finally came to the sea. Where it was I knew not, so I turned up the coast to the north till I came to Jaffa, where I found Christians and help, and from whence I wandered over Palestine among the Pagans, seeking news of my master's enemy, Bou Sheer, who, I knew, must have taken the head for a trophy in his infidel scorn. They showed me at Jerusalem the tomb wherein the body was buried, and I heard then that Gaston de Coucy had become the new Master. Then I resolved to come hither and show the king of France his treason, and demand permission to fight him and avenge my master's death."

"Why, man, art thou crazy still?" asked St. Pol, amazed. "Gaston de Coucy will never fight thee."

"Gaston de Coucy and his squire left us to die, abandoned us like cowards and traitors, and they shall both suffer for it," was the reply of Eustace, deep and hoarse like the growling of a wild beast. St. Pol looked at him in amazement, and tried to recall the gay squire of Guy de Coucy, whom he had known before the storming of Jerusalem.

That Eustace had been a tall, slender, delicate youth of eighteen, agile and full of skill, swift of foot, but too light to make a stalwart warrior in armor. This Eustace was as tall as ever, but his frame had filled out into a model of power, with hard knotted muscles, compacted into the strength of a Hercules, while his stern face, surrounded with brown waves of hair and beard, had hardly a trace of the boyish Eustace of old.

"But thou forgettest that thou art alone and that Gaston is rich and powerful," objected the count. "To whom canst thou go for justice?"

"The king will be here, so the people say," was Eustace's reply.

"But thou canst never see the king. Why, man, thy very life is not safe an instant after thou leavest my protection, if, indeed, it be safe here."

Eustace smiled, and his eyes glared in a strange, wild way that showed he was not yet altogether free from the effects of his brain trouble.

"My life is charmed from wound and scar till I find my master," was his answer. "He hath told me so himself."

"Told thee so himself! Why, he is dead!" ejaculated St. Pol, more and more surprised.

"His body may be, but his spirit lives, and I see it every night," answered Eustace, quietly. "Hark, they are coming now! let me go forth, for I must kill this Denis."

The transition was so sudden that St. Pol could not say a word for amazement, and the next moment Eustace sprang like a tiger across the court to the closed gates, and crouched, listening to something outside.

St. Pol listened too, and heard the clash of arms coming up the narrow street behind the house. It was the quarter from whence he expected an assault; for, unruly as were the French nobles of the day, they were hardly likely to attempt war in broad daylight in the principal streets, within sight of the Duke of Orleans, a prince of the blood.

He ascended the stone steps that led to the top of the stable-yard wall, and looked down.

A narrow alley between the tannery and an adjacent house was full of men in the Coucy livery, headed by the stout form of Denis, who was on horseback.

They halted before the gate, and one of the men tried the lock, when St. Pol cried out:

"What do ye there, ye knaves?"

Denis looked up and recognized his master's neighbor, to whom he said courteously enough:

"My lord count, this is our lodging, engaged of Stephen the Tanner. Your men have made a mistake."

"My men have made no mistake," was the

haughty reply. "This is our lodging, and we mean to keep it."

"Then hew the door down," cried Denis, suddenly throwing off the mask of politeness. "Batter it from the hinges."

"Pray, gentlemen, good gentlemen," cried a piteous voice at this juncture, "do no damage but divide the house in peace. There is room for all."

It was the unfortunate tanner, who was one of the municipal council and a rich citizen to boot, but who now saw himself in danger of losing all he had at one fell swoop. He was on foot among the partisans of Coucy, dressed in his velvet robes of office, in the hope of inspiring respect, but evidently getting little.

St. Pol looked scornfully down at him and inquired:

"Didst thou not hire thy house to me with all its belongings for two hundred crowns, thou knave?"

"I did, I did, my lord," was the piteous answer; and worthy Stephen looked thoroughly frightened, for he knew he was in the power of Denis. "But this noble gentleman hath offered me double the money and I know not what to do."

The fact was that Denis had caught the poor citizen unawares, kept him surrounded by menacing ruffians, and offered him the choice between instant maltreatment and letting his house, a choice hard to resist for a timid man.

"Why do you hesitate?" roared Denis. "This is our lodging. Force your way in."

"Cross-bowmen, to the walls!" was the equally fierce reply of St. Pol, and the next minute a shower of bolts flew from the rear windows of the tannery down the lane, killing one man, wounding several, and driving the rest back in confusion.

All this while "the Mad Palmer," as the men already began to call Eustace, had not stirred from his position at the gate, but now he suddenly rose up, cast off his brown robe, and appeared appareled in a short tunic of haircloth, his only garment, looking more maniacal than ever.

Uttering a loud yell, he snatched from the nearest soldier a great battle-ax, ran up the steps beside the knight, and dropped into the street—a light of some twelve feet—as actively as a cat.

Then, shrieking out: "Denis the coward! Denis the traitor!" he rushed undauntedly at the mass of armed men before him, over whom he towered like a giant, and hewed his way toward Denis, knocking down the retainers as if they had been children.

"Fore heaven, the man is crazed, of a truth!" muttered the count, as he watched his desperate onslaught. "See how they go down! But he will be killed at last."

It seemed, however, as if the words of Eustace about his bearing a charmed life were true, for he received no hurt that St. Pol could see, and a moment later the astounded knight beheld him drop his ax, leap on the horse which Denis was riding, and tear the stout squire out of his saddle as if he had been a baby, assuming his place but still holding Denis like a vise.

All the while he was uttering a series of maniacal yells and roars which seemed to appall the men of Coucy, for they bore back from before him as if he had been an evil spirit. Then St. Pol saw the horse rear up in the air, wild with terror, and the next minute the animal tore away down the narrow alley into the principal street, carrying Eustace; while before him on the saddle-bow was Denis, struggling vainly to release himself.

The picture was very brief, for the frightened horse was soon out of sight, but the whole crowd of retainers of Coucy followed after, in evident trepidation at the loss of their leader, and the count knew the attack was over for the present.

Leaving strict injunctions on his men to be careful, he mounted his horse and rode out with a few followers into the main street, which he found full of people, running to see the result of the mad race.

Far ahead of them he could see the flying figure of the horse with its double burden, from which every now and then flew something dark. Presently he saw one of the riders flung heavily to the earth, while the horse fled on faster than ever, and St. Pol galloped up to the spot to find Denis, stripped of armor and clothes, his face and body streaming with blood, lacerated and torn by the nails and teeth of the maniac, as if a wild beast had attacked him.

CHAPTER XI.

GASTON'S JOURNEY.

A SAD and sorry man was Gaston De Coucy when he looked at the dagger and scroll before him in the citadel of his own castle, and realized how near he must have been to death that night.

He looked round for Denis, and then remembered that he had sent his squire away to Orleans with half the available force of the castle.

The memory served completely to demoralize him, for he was entirely under the control of the more powerful will of Denis; and he hastily

made up his mind to leave the castle and go to Orleans at once. Starting from his chair, he shouted for his followers, and soon had them all around him, some half drunk, still others with aching heads from their last night's potations. There was little time for breakfast that morning, so nervous was the master and so anxious to be off, and he had almost forgotten all about Adeline when his attention was recalled to her by a voice as he sat on his horse in the court below the donjon tower, waiting for his train to assemble with the baggage.

This voice called him by name as he sat brooding; and, starting, he looked up at the tower.

There, half stretched out of an upper window, was Arlette, who called out:

"Master Gaston! Master Gaston!"

Gaston started. He had not been called by his Christian name by any of his vassals since he had succeeded to the title of Master of Coucy.

Angrily looking up, he cried:

"What mean'st thou, saucy wench?"

"My lady wishes me to say that she is going to Orleans herself and will be there before you," screamed Arlette, as loud as possible, to make herself heard.

Gaston grew more angry than ever at the pert bower-maid.

"Shoot me that jade, off the tower," he hissed to a cross-bowman, and the unscrupulous ruffian instantly obeyed, sending an arblast bolt whizzing up at Arlette before she could draw back. Had that arbalister's aim been as good as his will, the poor girl would have never drawn another breath; but as it was, the bolt grazed her head, passing through her flying curls, and dropped, blunted, from the stone casing of the window.

With a shriek Arlette drew back from the window, and in another minute a shower of white dust came flying down through the air from the tower, causing a general scattering of the men in the court.

They had seen sieges too often not to know what it was—quicklime—that burned like fire wherever it touched the flesh and blinded those whose eyes were unfortunate enough to get a speck of the white compound.

Gaston saw it and turned his back to flee, escaping most of the dose, but he was wild with fury at being thus braved in his own castle by a parcel of women.

"How much lime was there in the magazine?" he asked of the seneschal; and when he heard there were two full barrels he groaned in spirit, for he knew that the tower was destined to be a thorn in his side as long as it contained its present resolute, if feminine, garrison.

He left the castle in charge of the seneschal, however, and gave strict injunctions that the blockade was not to be broken on any account till the women came out to ask for food, when they were to be taken prisoners and sent to him under guard at Orleans.

These precautions taken, he rode away, followed by his train, and spurred hard for the Field of Honor at Orleans.

The distance was such that he was compelled to stop on the way for one night, encamping in the fields, but next day, at about an hour to noon, he entered the city and found it full of people and packed with the trains of nobles, as proud, and some nearly as rich, as himself. He was no longer lord of a neighborhood; but the plain Master of Coucy, a rich gentleman among his equals.

He felt, however, such confidence in the foraging abilities of his squire that he rode boldly into the town with his banner displayed; and when he noticed that everybody turned to look at it, he only thought it was through admiration of his power and riches.

When he arrived before the Hotel de Ville he looked around him at the stately houses in the square, to find where his own colors were displayed, but could see them nowhere.

The golden lilies of Orleans were on the towers of the Hotel de Ville, the white falcon of the Rohans was opposite, while the colors of Burgundy, Artois, Anjou and other princely houses fluttered at different points. The black lion on a white banner that he knew to be the cognizance of his neighbor, the Count St. Pol, streamed proudly from the top of a great building, half-dwelling, half-fortress, but really factory, beside the Hotel de Ville; but the gold chevron of De Coucy was not to be seen.

Full of amazement and anger, and hardly knowing what to think of it all, Gaston de Coucy looked round the square; when one of his men-at-arms respectfully observed:

"I think, my lord, I see our colors beside those of St. Pol."

Gaston started and looked in the direction indicated, and then uttered a savage imprecation:

"By the blood of St. Andrew, it is hers. What is this?"

He looked again and it was indeed true. The banner was that of De Coucy, quartered with the blue and silver chequers of the house of Fayel, to which Adeline, as a maiden, had belonged. It was the cognizance to which she was entitled as the widow of Guy de Coucy,

and there it fluttered by St. Pol's black lion, as peacefully as if the neighborhood were the most natural thing in the world.

Without waiting to consider where he was, Gaston spurred through the dense crowd which lined the square, followed by his retinue, and drew rein in front of St. Pol's door.

He was still clad in the ordinary riding-dress of the day, and mounted on a hackney, his war-horse and armor being led behind him.

As he paused in front of the door a column of men-at-arms in full panoply rode out of the side street by St. Pol's quarters, and passed right in front of him, escorting a beautiful horse-litter, richly decorated in gold.

The leader of this cortege, a tall knight with his visor down, sent his great horse against the slight hackney of the Master of Coucy as rudely as if the latter were only a scullion, and Gaston found himself shoved aside without ceremony. Had he been in armor himself with all his men he would have resented the insult, but as it was he felt like a dog in a strange place. No one seemed to notice him, and the column of clanking men-at-arms cut him off entirely from St. Pol's house. Between the bodies of the riders, however, he saw the door open; and there, as Arlette had predicted, was Adeline de Coucy, dressed in white robes, spangled with gold brocade, and wearing a white veil, coming down the steps followed by Arlette and the same Gipsy-looking girl they had all seen in the tower of Coucy.

Then the tall knight, with his visor down, shouted out in the unmistakable tones of St. Pol:

"Room for the most noble Dame de Coucy! Room, there!"

Gaston uttered a cry of surprise and laid his hand on the mailed sleeve of St. Pol.

"What dost thou there with my wife, and where are my quarters?" he asked.

St. Pol laughed in the hollow of his helmet and turned round as if he had but just noticed Gaston.

"Faith, the Dame de Coucy is good enough to take me for her knight; and ere she is wife of thine thou and I will have to break a lance together. Out of my way, fool! We are not in Languedoc."

So saying, he made an almost imperceptible signal to his men, when a dozen or more jostled Gaston out of the way with their heavy chargers, as the Lady Adeline and her two attendants stepped into the horse-litter.

Then the whole cortege cantered off across the square, leaving Gaston with his men, lamenting the fact that they had not assumed their armor, which was loaded on their chargers to be led behind them.

Gaston was, however, fain to swallow his mortification for the time till he found his squire; and for the first time sent out to ask questions about him.

His emissaries soon came back with long faces and bad news. The retinue of De Coucy was encamped in the fields outside of Orleans, unable to get lodgings, and Squire Denis had been set on by a maniac, the day before, and lay at the point of death in his tent.

This intelligence completely unnerved Gaston, so that he no longer thought of putting on a swelling deportment, but rode out of town sadly enough, to meet his disabled squire.

He had no idea yet of the minor particulars of the affair, having only heard of the maniac, who had disappeared in the woods, going in the direction of Paris.

One of the citizens readily guided him to his camp, which he found beautifully established in a flowery meadow near Orleans, with everything delightful and luxurious about it, even if it was not in the town itself. He dismounted from his horse, eagerly inquired for Denis, and was conducted to a tent where his unhappy squire lay, all bandaged up and hardly able to move for pain.

Then, to his horror and alarm, he learned the story of the previous day, and found that Denis had recognized Eustace in the maniac.

"You know, my lord, I am no weakling," said the stout squire, as he turned uneasily in bed. "I knew the man as soon as he shouted my name, for his voice was the same, though he was much changed otherwise. I was wont to wind the boy Eustace over my knee like a stripling, and when he sprang on me I thought to have an easy victory; but oh, my lord, he is a devil now, as strong as three horses; and he gripped me as I had been a child, tore off mine armor, and worried me like a wild beast. See where he bit me."

And the unlucky Denis showed on his breast, shoulders and arms the marks of pieces taken out as by the fangs of dogs, while his face was all seamed and furrowed with scratches.

"But these are all flesh wounds," objected Gaston. "They told me thou wert near dying, but these will heal quickly."

"True, true," whispered the squire, confidentially; "but it would not be well for the squire of the Master of Coucy to be beaten and clawed by one man in public, without making the affair a matter of life and death. Let them all think me dying. So much the better. When I get up again it will astonish them. Let them

have their musty houses in the city; we are better off in the fields."

It was now the turn of Gaston to relate the misfortunes that had befallen him in the town of Orleans, and Denis listened attentively to them. When his master had done, the squire said, reflectively:

"It serves us both right for going apart. Had I been there they never would have fooled you and Robert the seneschal, and had you been here, St. Pol would never have let that madman loose on me. We must go together in future, as of yore."

"But suppose this maniac should set on thee again?" suggested the Master, dubiously.

Denis grew ashy pale and shuddered in every limb at the recollection, for it was evident that he was completely unnerved by the attack; but his strong will rallied presently, and he said:

"I shall be ready for him, and so will my men. They were surprised last time, the assault was so quick; but next time they will kill him. Is my lord going to the tourney, to-day? All the town is full of it."

Gaston looked out of the door of the tent at the encampment spread around him. What, in two parts, was by no means a formidable troop, overslaughed by many another noble's train, was, when united, a body of two hundred and fifty fully equipped lances, each man-at-arms provided with an archer, a groom, and a *coute-lier*, or cutlass-man, thus making a total muster as large as a strong modern regiment.

"I am half-minded to go and show these pop-injay counts and dukes that the Master of Coucy is the peer of all," he said; "but I feel as if my right hand were cut off without thee, Denis."

"Nay, then, I will make shift to go with my master," answered the squire, raising himself on his elbow with a grimace of pain. "These wounds are large and some of them hurt badly, but none are deep, and I am as strong as ever."

Gaston did not make any objection to his squire's sacrificing himself in his master's cause, for in fact he felt very much like a ship without a rudder, when deprived of the counsels of Denis. Gaston, in spite of his bully and bluster, was really a weak man, not overburdened even with physical courage; though of that he had enough to make him pass muster among a crowd of ordinary soldiers.

A few hours later, the imposing *cortege* of Gaston de Coucy, headed by the crimson banner of the gold chevron, and followed by a band of men-at-arms, in complete steel from top to toe, swept through the city of Orleans on its way to the "Field of Honor," where the tourney had begun an hour before.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LISTS.

THE train of the Master of Coucy, now fully assembled, was the largest of any in town, not even excepting that of Louis of Orleans, and it attracted much attention as it passed.

Denis kept his visor down, to hide the long seams and furrows made in his face by the maniac's talons, but although very sore from his numerous surface wounds he was not so weak but that he could sit his horse and carry a lance.

When they arrived at the lists, which were pitched in the meadows east of Orleans, they found a gay and animated scene. The open expanse kept for the combats, about a quarter of a mile long, and half as much across, was of oval shape, surrounded with a high palisade, behind which rose several tiers of seats capable of accommodating over thirty thousand people. It seemed as if every seat was full, for the whole population had turned out in force, while all round the inclosure stretched the encampments of knights who were unable to obtain lodgings in the town. Gaston saw that he was by no means alone in his misfortune of exclusion from Orleans.

Within the lists were many nobles and knights on horseback, and just as Gaston came to the entrance, a cloud of dust in the center of the inclosure told that a combat was going on.

The Master of Coucy and his squire were met at the gates by a grave and splendidly armed knight, the golden lilies on whose white surcoat announced him as an officer of the royal family. It was, in fact, Jacques d'Avesmes, Constable of France, and Lord Marshal of the lists.

The Constable bowed courteously to the Master of Coucy, whom he recognized by his bearings, and informed him that he must leave his train outside, no one being allowed to bring more than a squire and page into the lists with him.

"Do you wish to tilt to-day, Master?" he added. "The roll is nearly full, but you can be let in by special favor of the Count of St. Pol, who left your name with his own."

"I ask no favors of St. Pol," replied Gaston, haughtily. "I will break a lance on him if he wishes, but it must be a sharp one, for our quarrel is to the uttermost."

"So saith the count himself," was the reply of the Constable. "If you choose him for an antagonist, you are the next in order."

"Good!" said Gaston, eagerly; for he was a good lance and felt confidence in the excellence

of his horse, which he felt certain was superior to that of St. Pol.

Then he gave his train in charge to one of his followers, and rode into the lists with Denis, just as the trumpet announced the conclusion of a contest.

He was courteously received by several of his Provencal friends who consoled with him on his late arrival in the lists and asked about the accident to his squire the day before. The Master impatiently answered the queries, which vexed him sorely, and asked in turn who had arrived.

He learned that the Count of Toulouse was the only person of all his neighbors not present, and that St. Pol had brought the Lady Adeline to the lists in great state. The lady was now installed, according to his information, on the grand stand with the Duchess of Orleans and all the great ladies of the court, having met with a distinguished reception.

Gaston ground his teeth as he heard this and looked around him. He saw the faces of many nobles whom he had met at Jerusalem, and he was fain to remember the sneers that had been openly made about him after the storming, when he saw the cold glances which met him everywhere.

He saw the grand stand surrounded with brilliant armed figures, and realized that a great part of the hostility to himself was aided by the admiration and sympathy given to Adeline and her misfortunes.

But he had not time to think much about all this, when he heard the trumpets blowing again and saw the glittering figure of the Lord Marshal riding toward him.

"It is the turn of the Count of St. Pol and the Master of Coucy," said the Constable, in a loud voice. "Take your places, gallant knights, and God give you fair fortune!"

Then Gaston moved off to his place in the lists and saw the tall figure of St. Pol in plain black armor towering opposite to him at the other end of the inclosure.

He heard a man say as he took his place:

"A hundred nobles on the black knight. He sits his horse like a soldier."

Gaston straightened up in his saddle, where he had been slouching somewhat carelessly, and turned to the crowd behind him.

"I take that wager and make it a thousand," he cried, in an angry tone, and then he heard Denis whispering through the bars of his helmet:

"Keep your temper for St. Pol, my lord. He is a stout lance."

The trumpets sounded their second blast at that moment, and Gaston savagely struck his spurs into the black Norman charger he rode, thundering over the lists to meet St. Pol.

Both met fairly in full career in the center of the inclosure, and both spears went all to shivers on the shields of the knights, while the horses reared and plunged to recover themselves from the shock.

Instantly Gaston caught up the battle-ax from his saddle-bow, a movement imitated by St. Pol, and the two closed in fierce strife. They were very evenly matched in height and weight, and it was hard to tell which would have been the victor, had not St. Pol's charger been the weaker of the two horses. Gaston, realizing this fact, pressed his enemy close, spurring hard, and finally the black horse rose with a savage squeal, pawing the air, and compelled St. Pol to slip off his own horse to escape being crushed.

The contest with axes was very brief and was ended by the Lord Marshal and a number of knights, who galloped in, parting the foes, to tell them that the combat *a l'outrance* was reserved for the last day.

St. Pol, however, having been dismounted, was judged unsuccessful, and the Master of Coucy had the proud satisfaction of hearing his name cried through the lists as victor. The angry count, protesting that he had been foully treated, and offering to fight the Master on foot or on horseback, at any time and place, was persuaded to leave the lists, smarting with anger and mortification; while Gaston, waving his battle-ax in triumph, was escorted to the front of the grand stand, where his eyes, for the first time since the interview at the castle, met those of Adeline de Coucy.

He was sorely tempted to address her, but the brilliant company in which he saw her restrained him from insult, and he contented himself with a frown of ominous import, to which the lady responded by a slight smile of scorn.

Then he heard the blast of a trumpet and into the lists rode a herald crying:

"Here comes the good knight, Walter, Count of Toulouse, whose lady is the peerless Adeline de Coucy, widow of Guy de Coucy, slain by foul treason, and will do battle on any knight who denies the lady to be the beauty of all France."

Gaston turned to look, and into the lists rode another knight in the armor of Toulouse.

CHAPTER XIII.

TOULOUSE.

GASTON DE COUCY looked at the new-comer in the lists with a sense of stupefaction, not so

much that it was his neighbor Toulouse, as on account of the accusation conveyed in the allusion to the death of Guy de Coucy. He had not heard a word of this matter in Provence or Languedoc since the end of the Crusade, and now it seemed as if it were cropping up on all sides to annoy him.

He rode out into the lists, not thinking of what he did, and shouted back:

"The man who says Guy de Coucy died by treason lies, and here stand I to prove it on his body."

Instantly there was a hush in the lists, where the accents of passion were out of place, and the Lord Marshal rode forward and rebuked Gaston for his speech, saying:

"This is a Field of Honor, set for gallant knights before the royalty of France, and no private quarrels must mar the festivities. Retire, sir knight, and if thou desirest a battle with the Count of Toulouse, it can only be in the next week, if so be he fight and vanquish a champion."

Gaston would have remonstrated in his anger, but a strong party of Orleanist knights swept down on him and escorted him from the lists, where Toulouse's herald was still calling out the bold challenge, to which Gaston was not permitted to respond, save in regular form through the heralds.

Full of anger, he retired to a place among the privileged mounted spectators within the lists, and found himself in the very midst of some of his old Jerusalem comrades, who had spread the worst stories about him.

Had it not been for Denis, the Master of Coucy would have felt very lonely at that moment, but the faithful squire rode up beside him and whispered caution and encouragement in his ear.

"You have beaten St. Pol, and this Toulouse is not so good a lance as the other," suggested Denis. "If he beats an opponent, you can pick him for your foe next week, but if you fought him now, after one battle already, the poorest lance in the land might do you a hurt. Would I were a knight, for now would I go to the lists against him myself, and I count myself able to turn him out of his saddle at any time."

This counsel comforted Gaston, even though none of his neighbors exchanged a word with him, and though all drew away, leaving a circle round him, but he soon became interested in the fortunes of Toulouse on whom he longed to take vengeance.

The challenge of the herald was not long in meeting a response, which came from a young knight called Roland de Rohan, who sent in his herald to proclaim that the Lady Matilda de Vergy was as much more beautiful than Adeline de Coucy as the sun exceeded the moon in splendor, and that he would prove it on Toulouse or any one else.

This sort of challenge was one sure to be received with favor, as it suited the fantastic notions of the times, and young Roland was soon in his place opposite the armed figure of Toulouse, while the trumpets blew the signal for the assault.

Denis watched the strange knight very keenly as he sat on his horse waiting, and surprised Gaston with the muttered observation:

"By my soul, yonder knight is not Toulouse, or I am a fool."

Gaston started.

"Why not?"

"Toulouse is fatter and not so tall. That man's armor does not fit him well."

Gaston looked doubtfully at the figures of the warriors and replied:

"We shall soon see. Toulouse always shakes his bridle-hand like a sieve ere he starts. 'Tis a bad trick he learned from those Saracens."

"Let them go!" shouted the Marshal of the lists at this moment; the trumpets clanged, and away went the two knights.

The strange Toulouse, if indeed it were a stranger in his armor, tilted better than any one had ever seen Toulouse ride before. Straight as an arrow, he flew across the lists, caught the young champion of Matilda de Vergy with his lance-point full in the middle of the breast, and sent him reeling over the croup of his horse in complete defeat.

Loud blew the trumpeters, and the heralds proclaimed aloud that the Lady Adeline de Coucy was justified by her knight as the beauty of France, till a better knight should bring his lady's colors into the field.

Then the Constable d'Avesmes rode into the middle of the lists and tossed his truncheon high in the air toward the setting sun as a token that the contests were over for the day, while the crowd began to disperse.

"I tell you," said Denis to his master, as they crowded through the gate with the press of knights riding home, "Walter de Toulouse is not here, and that fellow hath stolen his armor. Let us go and seek him, now that we are out of the lists with their cursed rules and etiquette. Here are our own men, and we are as good as any."

In fact, the great array of followers of the Master of Coucy was enough to inspire respect for his person as soon as he was out of the lists, and he began to make himself felt by riding

with his mailed column through the dense crowd of unarmed citizens who were now flocking from the seats into the camp and toward the city.

His purpose was to reach the grand stand before the ladies had left it and sweep off Adeline by a mingling of artifice and force, ere she could be rescued.

But when he arrived there, he found that he had reckoned without his host, for the grand stand was empty, and he learned that the ladies had crossed the lists and emerged from the opposite side, going toward the city with the family of the Duke of Orleans.

Full of rage and urged on by Denis, he gave the word to trot, and swept back, totally unheeding the crowd of citizens making for the road into Orleans.

Ahead of him were a host of gleaming spear-points and waving banners, blocking the path; but he dashed on, skirting the road, through the green meadows, followed and preceded by the screams of women and children, running for their lives out of the way of the mail-clad horsemen.

So large and compact a body has always something imposing in its appearance, and the crowd of horsemen on the road, composed of small parties of a dozen or twenty, and united by no common tie, shrunk instinctively to the other side of the way, when they heard the clank and thunder of armor and hoofs.

"Yonder is our bird," cried Denis, at last, pointing ahead through the dust.

They had nearly reached the head of the great procession, and the white banner with the golden lilies of France could be seen surrounded by the spear-points of a numerous cavalcade.

But beside that banner, in the spot indicated by Denis, was the red flag, quartered with blue, that revealed the retinue of the Dame de Coucy; and here it was that the squire had formed the bold design of cutting into the column as if by accident, and jostling the presumably small retinue of St. Pol away from the horse-litter.

Denis did not doubt that it was St. Pol's troopers who were still guarding the litter, though he did not see the count's banner; so he pressed his horse in on his master's and the whole column swayed bodily to the left and dashed obliquely into the head of the great mass of horsemen.

Then arose a great jostling and clashing and swearing, with the sound of blows on all sides and cries of pain. Denis found that instead of being in the midst of St. Pol's troopers, every man wore a white surcoat with the gold lilies, and realized that he was engaged in an act little short of treason. Gaston realized the same fact, and would have retreated at once, but the more powerful mind of the squire prevailed as usual, and they jostled their way on by main force, till they came to the horse-litter itself.

All were so closely wedged in together by this time that it was not possible to use a sword, and men were smiting each other with clenched fists, wrestling and cursing in rage, but with little actual damage to each other.

Then Denis uttered a cry of triumph as he forced his horse inside of the space occupied by the horse-litter, and gave the word to sway out to the right once more.

How it was done it was hard to say, but the next minute the two columns diverged again, and under the banner of Gaston de Coucy rode the horse-litter, while the whole cavalcade quickened its pace to a gallop.

"Now, my bold lady," cried the squire, triumphantly, "let us see you escape again, if you can."

CHAPTER XIV. THE FEAST.

GASTON was so much occupied in securing his flight with his prize, that he thought of nothing else as he rode on, giving his men orders to face about to the rear by divisions to repel any pursuit, while the rest hurried with the litter to camp. He fancied all the way that he heard the clank of mail behind him, and that he was being earnestly pursued, as he dashed over the meadows skirting the city walls, till he reached his own encampment.

What was his surprise and joy when he arrived there, to find himself entirely unmolested, without so much as a single horseman behind him, save his own men. Denis was equally overjoyed at this unexpected good luck, and readily assented to his master's proposal that they should strike camp and pursue their way to Languedoc.

"For," said Gaston, "it is plain that these women have fooled the seneschal in some way and stolen away from the castle; therefore the tower must be open again. Here we are in the midst of foes, but there it will take more than the power of Louis of France to take De Coucy."

Denis assented to the force of the reasoning, and departed to give the necessary orders, when Gaston, for the first time, advanced to the horse-litter, and drew the curtains with a rough hand.

But another surprise awaited him there, not so welcome as the first.

The litter was empty.

An angry man was Gaston de Coucy as he

realized the trick that had been played on him, and he had not finished cursing his ill-luck when one of the archers rode in to say that a heavy body of armed horsemen were coming toward the camp from the city, headed by the white banner of France.

In great perplexity and some alarm he sent for Denis, and they formed up their men in order, to defend the camp; an operation hardly completed when the dignified presence of the Constable at the head of his troops was seen within a bowshot of the camp.

The royal men-at-arms halted, and Jacques d'Avesmes rode forward to meet De Coucy, who, on his part, advanced with Denis, feeling decidedly sheepish.

The Lord Marshal of the lists was as grave and dignified as ever, and exhibited no trace of passion as he said:

"The most noble Prince Louis, Duke of Orleans, sends his greetings to the Master of Coucy, and saith that this pleasantry is ill-timed at a tourney. Nevertheless he will excuse it if the Master will restore to him at once the litter of her grace the duchess."

Gaston was thunderstruck.

"Of her grace the duchess! Why I saw my wife, Adeline, in this litter, not three hours since. She has fled from my bed and board, and I wished to force her back to her allegiance."

The Constable smiled slightly.

"I know nothing of any wife of the present Master of Coucy. The Lady Adeline, widow of the late Guy de Coucy, hath asked the protection of the duchess, which the most noble princess hath given her. Is the Master of Coucy ready to give up the litter?"

"I want none that is not my own," retorted Gaston, doggedly. "There is the litter. Take it."

This time Jacques d'Avesmes flushed with anger at the want of common decency evinced by Gaston.

"Now, by my faith as a knight!" he said; "we will see whether there are not cavaliers in Orleans to teach thee the respect due to a princess, ere this tourney be over. Send the litter with thy grooms and squire to the palace to-night, and crave mercy for having wantonly insulted a noble lady or 'twill be the worse for thee."

So saying he wheeled his horse with a sharp dig of the spurs and trotted indignantly away.

Denis, unlike his usual rough way, looked grave after this colloquy, and said to his master:

"Order out the litter and let us be in haste to gallop after him. If we stir up a hornets' nest by making Joan and Philip of Orleans our enemies without a cause, we shall need all the strength of Coucy's walls to stand a siege."

Without further delay he ordered out the litter and galloped away at full speed, never halting till he drew rein by the Constable of France, who looked very angry.

Denis, besides a strong will, had a shrewd brain and an oily tongue when he would, and he showed all his adroitness on this occasion.

"My lord, my lord," he said; "the Master of Coucy hath sent me to give back the litter of the Princess Joan, and to crave pardon humbly for his anger. He hath been sore provoked by certain false men who have stolen away the Lady Adeline, his ward and wife, from him."

The Constable gave a little cough that sounded as if he were somewhat mollified.

"Then why could he not say so at once?" he asked.

"Because my lord had no time to reflect and was angry that he could not be allowed to fight the false Count of Toulouse, who insulted him in the lists."

Jacques d'Avesmes growled to himself ill-temperedly:

"Beshrew me all these private quarrels, that gentlemen will drag into the midst of a feast. Well, go back to thy master, and tell him that his excuse is accepted. If he still wish to fight Toulouse, he can have a chance next week. In the mean time, he is bid to the feast with his kinsmen to-night, at the duke's palace."

Denis bowed low with profuse thanks, and returned with the good news to his master, whom he found very gloomy.

The squire's advice was urgent that they should go to the feast and try to ingratiate themselves with the duke, treating both St. Pol and Toulouse, should they meet them, with courtesy.

Gaston saw the force of the advice, for he felt, for the first time since he had been Master of Coucy, that he was in no condition to defy his enemies. He selected a retinue of ten knights out of his suite, all distant relatives, entitled to wear the gold spurs, and set off for the Hotel de Ville at the close of twilight.

Denis, not being a knight, was not privileged to sit at the banquet with his master, on whom he was supposed to wait; but the lacerated condition of his face effectually prevented his appearance in any such capacity.

Therefore he determined to go with his master only to the city, and to remain outside the palace in the crowd, to do what service he could in the way of intrigue.

They were soon within the walls, which they found guarded by a strong force of archers, selected from the retinue of the principal nobles, but all wearing the golden *fleur de lis* or lily in their caps, as a token that they were in the temporary service of the royal family of France.

At the gate they were met by an officer of the court, who required them to give up all arms but their daggers, which were used in those days instead of table-knives.

Gaston protested against what he called an indignity, but the officer pointed out to him the fact that every one in the streets was unarmed, and pleaded the order of the Duke of Orleans. The fact was that the duke, alarmed by the feuds which were constantly breaking out between the rival nobles gathered at the tourney, had adopted this method of securing peace at night. He trusted that a few more days of the rough sports of the lists would tame the turbulent spirits and render permanent peace a possibility during the rest of the festivities.

Denis, who was clad in complete mail and muffled in a long cloak, his steel cap hidden by a palmer's broad hat, escaped the rigor of the search and managed to carry in a short sword as well as his dagger, with which he slipped into the crowd of peaceful citizens that filled the streets, leaving his master and retinue to proceed to the Hotel de Ville.

The squire mingled with the throng in the darkness, quite unnoticed, and listened intently to every scrap of conversation that might throw a light on his search.

He was bent on discovering the whereabouts of Adeline de Coucy and the estimation in which his master's name was held in the city, outside of the nobility.

For a long time he heard nothing to give him any clew. The talk of the quiet citizens was all about the lists, with wise estimates of the prowess of the contestants and wagers on the victors of next day. He heard the names of many knights mentioned, but nothing transpired of interest till he came to the Place d'Armes or square in front of the Hotel de Ville.

Then, as he passed under the guttering oil lamps which lighted the front of a saddler's shop, he heard a whining voice that he remembered—that of Stephen, the rich tanner, to whom the saddlery probably belonged.

Denis passed on, shrouding his scratched face with hat and cloak, and leaned against the wall of a house in the shadow to listen.

"It is actually true, neighbor Picot," said the tanner. "They had no more respect for my robe of office than if I had been a tapster, and they hustled me about as I had been a prisoner. But the Lord of St. Pol is a brave lord, and he served them out for all their insolence. It is well seen that the duke was right in disarming all these country nobles, who have no more manners than the wolves and boars they hunt."

"And what became of the squire that ill-treated thee?" asked neighbor Picot.

"On the faith of a Christian, I know not. The maniac howled like a wolf, and they say that he tore the squire to pieces so that he died, but 'tis all one to me, so I never see him again."

"Who was his lord?" inquired neighbor Picot, curiously.

"Him they call the Master of Coucy. They say he hath sold his soul to the devil in times past, but that is none of our affair. Let us leave the lords alone, neighbor Picot."

But neighbor Picot was curious.

"De Coucy!" he repeated. "Why it is the Dame de Coucy who was with the duchess to-day, and whose knight won the last course."

"True, true, but she is a widow. They say, neighbor—I don't know how true it is—that her husband was beheaded by his cousin, who sold his head to the Turks."

"That cannot be," retorted Picot, obstinately. "She was all in white to-day like a bride, and widows dress in black. I saw her, after the tourney was over, ride into the city with the Count of Toulouse, and they went straight to the house of Bonhomme the baker, in the street of Black Lions."

Denis started slightly, and his armor rattled. He had come to a clew at last. Stephen the Tanner heard the clank and looked suspiciously over into the shadows.

"Chut! Picot, one listens," he muttered; and Picot and he drew back into the shop, where their voices were no more audible.

Denis hesitated a moment and then entered the shop after them, much to the consternation of the worthy tanner, who knew from the clank of armor under the cloak that the intruder was one of those men-at-arms from whom he had already experienced such rough treatment.

The saddlery was the only place around where there was any light, till the Hotel de Ville, brilliantly illuminated, was reached on the opposite side of the square.

Denis knew his man before he entered, and judged that Picot was not much bolder, so that he had fully made up his mind to bully his way to further information.

Setting his back against the door, he threw open his cloak and allowed the lamp-light to gleam on his armor, as he said:

"My worthy friends, go on with your talking

to me. Ten crowns if you tell me what I want, and a slit stomach if you will not."

Stephen turned very white, and stammered out:

"What is it that you need, noble sir? We are poor citizens—"

"And we know nothing about it," interjected the neighbor, hastily.

Denis deliberately turned and bolted the door. He had noticed, already, that the shutters were up. Then he drew his sword and shook it at them both, saying:

"Neighbor Picot, thou sayest that thou sawest the Dame de Coucy and the Count of Toulouse go to the house of a baker in the street of Black Lions. Citizen Tanner, where didst thou see them last? Tell me quickly, or I rip thee up in thine own shop."

He had judged, from something in the tanner's tone, that he knew more about the affair than he chose to divulge, and he remembered that as St. Pol's landlord he might know whether Adeline was still under the count's protection.

Stephen the Tanner sweated and trembled with fear. He did not yet recognize his interlocutor, but he feared the dark shadow over the hidden face, and stammered, in answer:

"I know nothing. The lady came to the count after the madman killed De Coucy's squire, and she went away to the duke's palace as the tourney opened. That is all I know."

"Where is Bonhomme, the baker?" asked Denis, after a short pause of cogitation.

"In the next street. I will gladly show your worship," cried neighbor Picot, glibly, anxious to escape closer quarters with this savage-looking desperado.

Denis hesitated a moment and then said, in a surly tone:

"I will not trouble you. I can find my way alone. Down on your knees, both of you."

The citizens obeyed, trembling more than ever, and Denis brandished his sword as he uttered a string of savage imprecations on them if they dared to leave the shop to follow him for the space of an hour.

Terrified nigh to death, both men eagerly swore to obey him, and the squire left the shop, shutting the door behind him.

He knew a good deal of the town, from his morning explorations, and quickly found the house of Bonhomme the baker, in the street of Black Lions.

The place was all dark, and the squire found the street, which was a black one, nearly empty of people. He prowled around the front of the house for some moments, looking carefully at every opening, to make sure that he would know the place again; and then, supposing that the Lady Adeline, if Picot's story was true, had gone to the banquet at the Hotel de Ville with her cavalier, he turned away, intending to return to camp and introduce some of his men in the night.

Suddenly, and without any sort of warning, he felt a heavy clutch on his shoulder. He had heard no footfall, but he knew the remorseless power of that gripe.

His knees smote together with abject terror for the first time in his life, and he turned his eyes shudderingly on the giant form of Eustace, the Mad Palmer, standing beside him in the gloom. He could see in the faint starlight that the maniac was nearly naked, the short hair-cloth tunic he had worn being all in tatters, while his bare arms and legs were hairy as those of a bear.

Denis was no coward, but he had received such a horrible mauling only the day before from this huge maniac, that it cannot be wondered at that he trembled before Eustace. The latter did not, however, seem to recognize him in the dark, and Denis stared up into the madman's eyes with a rapt fascination, neither saying a word for some moments.

Then Eustace spoke in a low, musical tone, as if he were in a trance.

"I have not found it yet. Hast thou seen it anywhere? Oh, tell me, and I will pray for thee at the Savior's tomb. A palmer's prayers are carried first to heaven by the angels, thou knowest. Hast thou seen it?"

"Seen what?" gasped Denis, in a husky whisper of extreme fear.

"My master's head," was the sad reply. "They say I am a wild beast because I bite and tear, but it is only my master's foes. Tell me where the Turks have hidden it."

"I do not know," stammered the squire, in the same whisper.

Eustace's grasp closed on his shoulder, and his voice took a menacing tone.

"Tell me before the wild beast comes on. Tell me where it is."

"It is in the great square, in the house where the nobles are," whispered Denis, catching at a subterfuge in his desperation.

Instantly Eustace released him and laughed a low, pleased laugh.

"I will go there," he said, simply. "The moon will be new in a week from now, and that is the time I am the wild beast. Now I am quiet."

The poor creature turned and disappeared in the darkness as noiselessly as he had come; and

Denis, heartily thankful for his escape, and chuckling over the way in which he had deceived Eustace, stole away toward the square and mingled with the crowd.

He had little difficulty in finding the palace, and hid himself in the throng that waited before the door, after the fashion of crowds wherever there are feasts.

Presently there was a loud buzz of excitement, and the crowd parted; while towering over them, came the wild, shaggy head and naked hairy shoulders of Eustace, the Mad Palmer.

The people fell away from him on either side with cries of terror, and the mad squire, his great blue eyes fixed and glassy, stalked on through the crowd as silently as a ghost.

He came to the steps of the palace door, and Denis pressed to the front of the crowd to watch him, when one of the guards threw forward his halbert and shouted for his comrades to help him. The madman was entering the palace!

The moment Eustace saw the glitter of steel and felt the point against his naked breast, he uttered a yell so shrill and piercing that it produced an instantaneous hush all over the square. The sound of that blood-curdling yell penetrated into the palace and startled the guest at the banquet where Louis of Orleans and his wife sat at the head of the table, with Adeline de Coucy at the right hand of the duchess, and noble lords and ladies crowding the table. Gaston de Coucy, down at the foot of the board, heard it and started up, trembling, fearing he knew not what. St. Pol, sitting next to Adeline, heard it and stifled an oath of surprise as he rose half-up, as did most of the men.

Then, with a peal of laughter, the Mad Palmer dashed the halbert away and bounded up the stone steps into the banquet-room where he leaped on the table with another yell, and shouted:

"I am Eustace the wanderer! Where is my master's head?"

The apparition was so startling that the duchess fainted and the men drew their daggers and shouted for the guards. As for Gaston, he stared like one transfixed with horror at the wild figure.

Then Adeline de Coucy sent forth a faint cry through the stillness:

"It is Eustace. My God!"

Instantly the wild man uttered a shout, and made a tremendous leap over the heads of the guests, landing at the feet of Adeline, before whom he crouched like a dog expecting a beating, crying:

"I will be good, I will be good. I have not found it yet, but I have found thee, my lady. Yes, I have found thee."

And he sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER XV.

A TANGLED WEB.

THE scene of confusion that ensued on the wild leap of the madman was partially quieted by the way in which he now cowered at the feet of Adeline de Coucy, evidently perfectly harmless for the time.

Adeline, while terrified to a certain extent by the wild looks and hairy figure of Eustace, was yet outwardly calm and undisturbed, and her recognition of the formerly polite and attentive squire under the matted locks of the maniac was a great safeguard to her against extreme fear. The evident submission of this huge shaggy creature to her will had in it also something which appealed to her pride, if not vanity, and she softly stroked the matted curls of Eustace as she said:

"Hush! hush! be still, be still!"

Louis, Duke of Orleans, who had looked on with amazement, now asked her, in a low tone:

"Who is this?"

"It is Eustace, the squire of my dear lord, whom all men believed to have perished with him at the taking of Jerusalem," she replied. "I knew his voice when he spoke, though face and form are sorely changed."

Eustace heard the low conversation above him and seemed to crouch even lower before the lady under the shelter of the table, when St. Pol observed:

"The man was reasonable enough yesterday till he saw Denis, the squire of the Master of Coucy, whom he mauled so badly, and since that he seems to have gone wild again."

"What! is this the one that killed the squire in the street?" asked the prince, in a tone of interest. "He must be terrible when he is roused, though now he seems so gentle and lamb-like."

Here some of the guards, who had made their way into the hall, came up, and looked inquiringly at their master as if to ask whether they should use force against the maniac. The duke whispered to Adeline:

"See if you can persuade him to go quietly. I do not wish to hurt the poor gentleman, if he be really the man you think."

Adeline bent over and touched Eustace on the shoulder, saying:

"Eustace, the duke wishes you to go away till the banquet is over. Will you go quietly?"

To the surprise of every one the poor creature answered in a tone of perfect sanity, if of deep misery:

"Is there not some kind Christian here, for the love of Holy Cross, will lend a poor pilgrim his cloak to cover his nakedness? Here hath the Evil One carried me, all unawares, and how can I go hence before the eyes of noble ladies, as I am?"

St. Pol, who had the advantage of some previous acquaintance with Eustace in his rational mood, saw that the poor squire's reason had returned for the time, and instantly rose and threw his own cloak from the back of his chair, over the shoulders of the crouching man.

"Will your grace permit the guards to take him to my lodging?" asked the count. "The poor gentleman was there yesterday morning, and as rational as any of us, and I think he would rather go there than anywhere."

"I will go to the Count of St. Pol's house if I can find it," said Eustace himself, in a quiet voice. Then he rose to his feet, carefully wrapping the cloak round him, and bowed to the duke with a certain dignified courtesy that was surprising after his late wild demeanor.

"I crave pardon of your grace," he said; "if you are indeed, as I think, the chief. I am here; but, as God is my witness, I know not how I came here. I am under a vow to enter no house till I find my master's head, and the Evil One must have carried me hither to tempt me to break it."

"And do you not know me, Eustace?" asked the soft tones of Adeline de Coucy, at this juncture.

Eustace looked at her sadly and replied:

"I know the noble lady, widow of my dear master, and how I came before her in such a foul guise as this, I cannot tell."

He bowed once more, and then turned and followed the guards silently from the room. As he passed, all the guests on his side the table half-rose in their seats and turned round in curiosity to see what manner of man it was that had created all this excitement.

The only exception to this rule was Gaston de Coucy, who sat near the bottom of the table, in the place that had been assigned to him by the chief seneschal of the duke. The Master of Coucy kept his seat with all his followers, and affected to toy with his plate, studiously avoiding to look at Eustace.

His conduct was noticed by more than one of those near him, mostly nobles of the north and center of France, who were jealous of the power and influence of the great Master of Coucy in the south, and resented the pride of his motto, before which their own titles of baron and count sounded so petty.

De Coucy had but two of his neighbors in Languedoc near him in the whole assemblage of the Field of Honor; and of these, one—St. Pol—was openly hostile to him, while the other, the Count of Toulouse, who had borne himself so well in the tournament that day, had disappeared since its close and was nowhere to be seen. Gaston had made diligent inquiries about him at the feast, both by his own mouth and those of his followers; but had only discovered a few disconnected facts that left him no wiser than before.

Toulouse had been seen riding away from the lists with a lady after the close of the tournament, and it was said that he lodged in the street of Black Lions, but who the lady was and where the house no one knew.

So there was the Master of Coucy at the crowded feast, compelled to look up to the head of the table and see Adeline petted by the noblest, while he himself could not so much as speak to her. He had indeed entered the palace with the resolve of addressing her anyhow; but when he found every one already at table, even he did not dare to defy etiquette by making a disturbance. He therefore took his place sullenly, watching and listening, and thus witnessed the sudden irruption of the maniac Eustace and the equally sudden collapse of his violence.

Then, as Eustace passed down the room behind him he remembered the lesson that Denis had received, and began to tremble for fear his dead cousin's squire might recognize and assault him also. However, no accident of the sort happened, and Gaston heaved a deep sigh of relief as he saw the tall form of Eustace disappear down the grand staircase.

The buzz of conversation that ensued over the late scene soon brought up his own name once more; and the Master of Coucy began to wince again under the comments freely made concerning the storming of Jerusalem, seven years before. It seemed as if all his neighbors were joined in a conspiracy to taunt him by guarded hints, though none said anything in which his name was openly assailed.

At last he could stand it no longer, but rose hurriedly from his seat and left the table in a towering passion with the duke.

The prince noticed the movement at the foot of the table and looked inquiringly at St. Pol, whose reply was a smile of triumphant meaning.

"The conscience works," said the count, pithily. "Ere the meeting is over, your grace shall

see him confess all his villainy or I am no honest man."

The duke looked troubled by the sudden exit of De Coucy and his retinue, which called attention to the fact that the Master was dissatisfied with his treatment, but he only nodded his head and said:

"Remember, my lord, I must hold the Lady Adeline responsible for all that happens, should it not prove that this stranger's story be true as to the treason of Gaston de Coucy to his cousin."

"I am content to be so held," replied the clear voice of Adeline herself, at this juncture. "My noble friend St. Pol hath shown me such loyalty and friendship since he hath heard my tale that I were worse than ungrateful did I not give him my trust and friendship in all honor."

"Be it so," answered Louis of Orleans, gravely, and then he looked with some surprise toward the door, where another commotion seemed to be taking place.

The glitter of the halberds and gisarms of the guards, high overhead, showed that some one was trying to force a way in or out, and the sound of excited, angry voices made this quite clear.

"See what it is, St. Pol," said the duke, in a low tone, and the stout warrior needed no second bidding to hurry down to the door, where he soon found the cause of the trouble, in the person of his old friend Toulouse, red and perspiring with anger and heat, covered with mud as a man who had ridden hard, and arguing with the guards beside Gaston de Coucy.

"I tell thee I am Walter de Quiberon, Count of Toulouse," cried the irate count; "and the man who hath been masquerading here is a base thief who hath stolen my armor. Let me go in to see the duke and demand justice."

"None can go in unless in a dress fit for a banquet," objected the officer of the guard, with a look of great perplexity at his dilemma. "I would not disoblige my lord, but it is impossible to admit him in such a guise as this."

"And I say that he shall come in with me, the Master of Coucy, if with no one else," cried Gaston, interposing. "We have been trodden on long enough, we gentlemen of Provence. Come in, Toulouse, I say."

And ere St. Pol could interpose, Gaston and his ten followers, aiding Toulouse, had shoved their way into the room, and now came rushing up beside the table to where the duke was sitting.

This time the guests did not rise or show any confusion. They judged from the sound of voices that it was a dispute for admission or precedence, and such were too common in medieval times to excite much notice.

Up the room rushed Toulouse and Gaston, followed by St. Pol, who had vainly tried to stop them, and the count vociferated at the top of his voice, so that all the room could hear him:

"Justice, my lord duke, justice on a scurvy Syrian minstrel called George of Antioch, who hath stolen my armor and the keys of my castle, and hath been riding here in this tourney, personating myself to my disgrace."

By this time most of the knights and ladies in the room were tittering; for there was something in the stout and muddy figure of the knight, and the nature of his complaint, that excited their risibilities.

Even the duke could not help a smile as he answered:

"Meseemeth he must be a sorcerer, or thou a very careless knight to suffer such losses. Who is this George of Antioch, of whom thou speakest?"

"A sorcerer who was practicing his witcheries on the Count of St. Pol," cried Toulouse, eagerly. "The count was even afraid to keep as a prisoner the sorcerer's leman, for fear that she might bewitch his house and escape."

"Where is he now?" asked the duke, who, as host of such a crowd of punctilious and high-spirited nobles, was compelled to exercise much patience.

"He is in this city," answered the angry count; "and I have but just heard from De Coucy's squire, that he lodges at the house of one Jean Bonhomme, a baker."

St. Pol, who was listening to all this in silence, looked keenly at Adeline de Coucy, and saw that she was very pale. The stout count, who had acquired, since he came to Orleans, a great deal of information that he did not have before, at once struck into the conversation with the abrupt question:

"And this prisoner of thine, Walter, that I wagered thee ten crowns thou couldst not keep, is she out?"

Toulouse, who had not at first noticed St. Pol in his excitement, started and flushed crimson with embarrassment at the question.

"Come with me a moment, my comrade," continued St. Pol, and he beckoned Toulouse to one side. "I have a word or two to say to thee."

Then he drew Toulouse to the corner of the room and whispered something in his ear which seemed to have an astounding effect on the

count, for he whispered energetically back, and the two began an animated discussion in low tones.

Meantime the guests at the table, fretful at being disturbed so often at their meals, had resumed their interrupted conversations and were making up for lost time by a buzz in which the head of the table was totally ignored.

But Gaston de Coucy, finding himself brought by an accident near Adeline and the duke, made use of the opportunity to say in a reproachful tone:

"Is it well done or ill, your grace, to assist a man's wife to leave him in dishonor?"

The duke looked up in some little surprise, but promptly answered:

"It is ill done, whoever did it."

"Then why does your grace aid and protect this, my runaway wife, in her disobedience?" demanded the Master of Coucy, laying his hand on the white shoulder of Adeline as he spoke with no gentle clasp.

Instantly the duke's face clouded over, and he pointed imperiously at the offending hand.

"Unhand the lady, sir," he said, in his sternest tones. "She is no wife of thine, but the widow of Guy de Coucy, unmarried since the day he died."

"And I say, my lord duke," replied Gaston, in just as firm a tone, "that this is my wife, married to me by father Ambrose, the parish priest at Coucy, not three days ago. Therefore I demand her person now."

There was a new ripple of excitement among the feasters, as this speech rung out over the din of voices, and the tongue of gossip was very active as lords and ladies glanced curiously up at the head of the table.

"Let the lady say herself whether she is wed to thee or not," suggested a smooth, oleaginous voice at this moment; and the violet robes of the Bishop of Orleans, who sat near, interposed between the excited noblemen. "There seems to be a dispute here, which none but the church can settle."

The appearance of the ecclesiastic produced an immediate hush; for it was in the days when the church was practically omnipotent, and when popes ordered emperors to be de-throned with a certainty that they would be obeyed.

Gaston immediately removed his clutch from Adeline's white shoulder, where it left deep red marks that told of the force with which his fingers had closed upon her. The duke bowed and resumed his seat, and Adeline looked up to the priest as if confiding in his protection.

"What sayest thou, daughter? Art thou married to this man or no?" asked the bishop.

"I am not, father," was the low but firm response.

"Look at this, lord bishop, and judge whether I or this woman do lie," cried Gaston, triumphantly; and as he spoke he waved the parchment certificate given him by father Ambrose before the bishop's eyes.

The other took it gravely and examined it, then turned on Adeline.

"How sayest thou, daughter? What means this certificate of marriage?"

Adeline looked at it indifferently and shrugged her white shoulders.

"It is none of mine. I never was wed to him."

"You see, my lord bishop, she is disobedient and unruly. Again, I claim her as my own."

"And I say that I will not go to this man," retorted Adeline, firmly. "He is cruel and a traitor to my lord, Guy. I call on my lords of St. Pol and Toulouse to defend me from his violence."

"St. Pol has fallen before me already," answered Gaston, with an evil sneer; "and Toulouse will not fight in thy cause."

"I think he will," retorted Adeline, and she made a sign to St. Pol to advance.

The good count had been eagerly engaged in whispering to Toulouse, and now he came forward willingly enough, bowing low, leaving his old friend silent and embarrassed.

"I wish you, my lord St. Pol," said the lady, "to be my champion against the cruelty of this bold and bad man, who has done treason to his cousin, my dear lord. Will you fight for me?"

"I will, if his grace permits," was the ready reply; but Louis of Orleans shook his head.

"It cannot be," he said; "this is no place for private feuds, however worthy. The matter is one which can only be settled by the church, therefore I order the Lady Adeline into the custody of the Lord Bishop Odo of Orleans, till this tourney be over. After that time let the justice of God be decided by wager of battle between this lady's champion and the Master of Coucy."

Gaston's face lighted up, for he had reason to believe that his money would be of use in a cause in which the church was interested.

"I am quite content," he said. "My wife is safe from harm in the custody of the church, and will not be allowed to consort with strange knights to my dishonor."

"Be it so, then," rejoined the duke, in a tone of relief. "The church has abroad back for burdens."

CHAPTER XVI.

NEW FACES.

WHEN Denis Morbec, waiting out in the square, saw his master come forth from the banquet that night, he was eager to report his news; but to his chagrin Gaston told him that he knew it already and added to it the particulars he had gleaned within.

Then the quick-witted squire drew his master aside and whispered earnestly to him:

"We must use this night, and that quickly. They have gained over Toulouse in some manner by their devices, but the game is not all over yet. We are twelve here, and I have found forty more, the followers of the knights of Yonne and Var. They will help us. Let us go to this baker's house. It is plain that this George of Antioch has been spreading slanders about the dead Master and you, which must be silenced. We have our daggers, and the night is dark. Let us put an end to him and his witcheries and Saracen tricks. Then we are safe. If not, he will pour poison in the ears of every noble in Orleans, and we shall be driven out."

"But will these men follow us?" asked Gaston, dubiously.

He knew the names of the knights mentioned by Denis, small heritors and liegemen to the Lord of St. Pol.

"Ay, for it seems that St. Pol hath offended them both to-day, by refusing them quarters in his lodging. They are even ready to throw off their allegiance to him and do homage to the Master of Coucy."

"Is it indeed so?"

Gaston's eyes glittered, for he was covetous of power.

"Lead on and find me thy men," he said. "Let us finish with this George of Antioch."

Denis led the way across the square through the now-rapidly-dispersing crowd, and beckoned as he passed to several groups of men, who seemed to be waiting his summons.

Ten minutes later a band of over fifty men surrounded the house of baker Bonhomme in the dark Street of Black Lions, and pried cautiously about for an entrance. There were lights in the upper windows, and they felt satisfied that their game was trapped at last.

Denis as usual was the leader, and he was also the man who found a practicable entrance from the back door of the bakery into the house and forced it open with a crowbar, with which he had provided himself when planning the expedition. Denis, as our readers know, was a provident man.

No sooner was the door open than the crowd of armed men rushed through the lower house, occupying the whole of the floor and closing every avenue of escape, after which Denis and his master, followed by the whole of the Coucy kinsmen, drew their long daggers and ran swiftly and silently up-stairs.

The noise they had made in entering had evidently alarmed the people above, for a light shone down from the next story and a voice cried out in quavering tones:

"Who's there?"

For all answer Denis rushed up and beheld a white figure, that of a short squat citizen in his night-gown, holding a lamp in hand and trembling with fear.

The squire rushed at him with his sword flashing in the light, and demanded fiercely: "Where is the knight that lodges here—the Syrian, George of Antioch? Tell me, ere I cut thy throat."

"Good my lord, there is no Syrian here," stammered the citizen; but Denis cut the matter short by dashing open door after door, being rewarded by discovering the citizen's wife, as fat as himself, with a family of small children, all frightened to death and howling lustily for fear.

Then he and Gaston together, after a thorough search, came back to the citizen and did what they should have done at first—cross-questioned him as to his supposed lodgers.

They learned that the Count of Toulouse, as the citizen had supposed him to be—a tall noble with a black beard from the description—had come there and taken the lodging early in the day before, had gone to the tourney next day, had returned with a lady in the evening, and had given up his lodging and departed with the lady within an hour afterward.

No more did honest Bonhomme—it was the baker himself—know.

Gaston was immediately struck with an idea. Why should he not take the lodgings himself for some of his followers, and so retain a spy in the enemy's camp during the tourney? No sooner said than done.

Honest Jean Bonhomme, tempted by the glitter of gold and frightened by the gleam of arms, was only too glad to relet his lodgings, and Denis was left to occupy them while the Master of Coucy dismissed his late allies with a gratuity and returned to camp, well satisfied with his night's work. He had obtained a foothold in the city.

As for the squire, he felt that he was occupying a dangerous position in Orleans, with few friends and many foes. He was especially puzzled and alarmed by the behavior of Toulouse, as reported to him by his master.

When Denis had first met the angry knight, who had entered the town after dark and with some difficulty, he had thought himself particularly lucky; and when he heard from Toulouse of the trick that had been played on him by George of Antioch, the squire congratulated himself on having found at least one firm ally.

But it appeared from Gaston's account that the knight who had entered the banquet-hall of Orleans full of rage against the Syrian, and a firm ally of Gaston de Coucy, had shown a marvellous change as soon as St. Pol had whispered to him awhile. He had become placable and quiet, showed no more anger against George of Antioch, and turned the cold shoulder forthwith on Gaston.

Denis reflected over all these things before sleeping that night, and in the morning was up betimes and watching from the window for the guard which his master had promised to send him.

No sooner were the gates fairly opened for the day than the promised escort filed in under the guise of a retinue for the Master himself, who, however, did not enter the city with them, and Denis soon had the satisfaction of seeing the house of honest Bonhomme turned into a regular barrack, full of archers and cutlassmen, so that he had no further fears on the score of meeting Eustace. He even had serious thoughts of hunting out the mad squire and putting a few arrows through him to get rid of him, for Denis was an eminently practical man and believed thoroughly in the maxim that "Dead men tell no tales."

He was deterred from this, however, by the reflection that Eustace was probably under St. Pol's guardianship, and would not be allowed abroad in the city.

While he was cogitating over the ways and means for securing safety to himself and his master from the devices of the Syrian minstrel, the trumpets blew the signal through the streets of the city to bid all who wished to see the sports repair to the lists, and Denis was just about to retire from the window for the purpose of arming himself, when his attention was attracted by the apparition in the street of a figure that seemed familiar. The squire looked again closer, then uttered an oath of surprise and rushed down-stairs into the street.

An old white-headed knight, mounted on a sober charger that tramped steadily along, was riding through the street beside a monk in coarse brown robes, whose bare feet were hanging on each side of a lean mule, without saddle or any head gear but a rope and halter. The mien of this monk was modest and downcast to insignificance. He seemed to be shrinking away from notice; and yet the street was fast crowding with people whose eyes were bent on him, and him alone. His frame was small and slight, thin to emaciation, and what could be seen of his face under the cowl revealed a pair of dark, sunken eyes, a haggard face with hawk-like nose, and a scanty gray beard.

And yet it was this same quiet, insignificant-looking monk who had been the means of reusing the whole of Christian Europe as it had never been roused before and precipitating it in waves of fire and blood on the Moslem world for a mere idea.

For this monk was Peter the Hermit. The Crusade over and his work done, this singular ascetic had returned to France, and retired once more to the hermitage from whence he had issued as a pilgrim a few years before.

Denis knew all this as soon as he saw the Hermit. He knew that the holy man had been proclaimed as being the preacher for the week in the cathedral, and that this was the cause of his being in Orleans. But this was not the reason of his sudden rush down-stairs as soon as he saw the pair riding so soberly along.

It was the other member of the two that attracted his attention, for he recognized in him the aged castellan of Coucy, Sir Baldwin, whom everybody believed to be too infirm to walk abroad, much less to sit a horse.

Yet here was the old knight in Orleans on horseback; and as there were no carriages in those days, it was pretty clear that Sir Baldwin must have ridden all the way from Coucy, a feat impossible to a broken-down old man.

When the squire realized all this, he made up his mind to catch Sir Baldwin if possible and arrest him as a liegeman of the Master of Coucy, escaping from his duty.

He did this, not so much because he imagined that Baldwin could be any use as a vassal, but because he saw him with Peter the Hermit, knew the power of the latter's name, and feared that Baldwin was engaged in the task of poisoning the monk's mind against Gaston de Coucy. Full of these ideas he called hastily to his men, ran out into the street and succeeded in getting before the old knight's sober steed before it had reached the next corner.

With Baldwin's bridle safe in the clutch of two stout archers, the old knight surrounded with a ring of spear-points, Denis felt comparatively safe. He also realized that he had to deal cautiously with the arrest, on account of the Hermit's presence. Therefore he bowed low to Peter, and said:

"Most holy hermit, I crave pardon for this

act of seeming violence; but this knight hath stolen away from his liege lord who hath sent me to arrest him."

The Hermit looked at him in some surprise, and observed:

"Son, I have no call to interfere between any here. I am but the worst of sinners in God's sight."

All this while the party chiefly interested—Sir Baldwin—had not said a word, nor made a motion of resistance to the sudden assault.

Now for the first time he addressed Denis quietly but as haughtily as ever, saying:

"Order these men to drop my bridle and stand thou from the path, Denis Morbec, or it will be the worse for thee."

Denis laughed in a tone of scorn.

"Worse for me! Nay, then, bring him along to my lord."

Sir Baldwin raised his right hand in the air as if beckoning, and in a moment Denis heard the trotting of horses' hoofs coming down the street. Half-alarmed, he looked that way and beheld George of Antioch riding toward him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CAPTURE OF BALDWIN.

THERE was something in the appearance of the Syrian minstrel at this crisis in the affairs of Denis Morbec and his master that inspired the squire with strange hopes. He realized that for some reason or other George of Antioch was the head and front of all the enmity that had been stirred up against Gaston de Coucy, and that if he could only capture him, or in default of that, kill the minstrel, it would be a good stroke of policy.

George of Antioch, on this morning, was alone. His faithful henchman, Jacques Marcel, with the girl page, were nowhere to be seen, and the Syrian himself was to all seeming unarmed, being clad in the long robes of an oriental Christian.

Nevertheless, this mysterious personage rode on as calmly as if nothing was to be apprehended, and came right into the midst of the Coucy party, where he saluted both Baldwin and the Hermit with grave courtesy, and then demanded:

"What is the matter, Sir Baldwin? Who are these men that hold thy bridle?"

"They are vassals of the Master of Coucy, who seem determined to make me go with them at the command of a paltry squire!" replied the old castellan, quietly.

George of Antioch turned on Denis.

"Dost thou pretend to command an act of violence like this within the dominions of the Duke of Orleans?" he asked, calmly and coldly.

Denis looked him long and searchingly in the face. Something he saw there made the squire hesitate a moment. Then he drew a deep breath, as if to harden his heart into courage, and answered:

"Violence or none, the Master of Coucy arrests his vassals where he finds them. Thou hast stolen away one of them thyself. Seize him, men."

As he spoke the squire suddenly sprang at the other's bridle, and in another moment George of Antioch was to all intents and purposes a prisoner.

He did not seem to be in the least alarmed or disconcerted by the fact, for he only frowned gravely on Denis, and said, much in the same words that Baldwin had used:

"Denis Morbec, let go my bridle, or 'twill be the worse for thee."

Denis only laughed scornfully at the threat, which he regarded as an idle one, and began to lead the horse to the house of Bonhomme, his archers closing in behind him.

All this while, Peter the Hermit had not said a word, sitting on his lean mule and regarding the whole scene curiously with his dark, sunken eyes.

When the squire and his men began to lead away their two prisoners the Hermit shook his halter and pressed on a little, saying earnestly:

"My sons, my sons, think what ye do. This land is that of Louis of Orleans, and no man may exercise sovereignty thereupon save the duke himself."

"We have thought, holy father," answered Denis, impatiently. "Come on, men."

Already they were at the gates of the stable-yard, and Denis went about congratulating himself on the fact that the street was empty of anything but the rabble at that early hour, when the heavy clank of armor and trotting horses was heard and the white banner of the Constable of France appeared at the end of the roadway, coming straight toward the house.

But hardly had this happened, when an equally loud clanking and trampling was heard at the other end of the same street, and the scarlet and gold banner of the Master of Coucy swept into sight.

"Into the house with them!" cried Denis, eagerly, and the order was instantly obeyed as regards Baldwin. Not so, however, with the Syrian minstrel.

No sooner did Denis try to lead the Arabian ridden by George of Antioch into the stable-yard, than the animal suddenly reared, uttered a savage scream, and lashed out with both fore

feet like a boxer at the squire, compelling Denis to let go and spring back for fear of his life.

The Syrian made no apparent motion to control or direct his animal, which now commenced a series of the wildest contortions among the armed men, lashing out behind and pawing down in front, wheeling round, biting and squealing, while George of Antioch sat quietly in his deep Mameluke saddle, with a grave smile on his face, looking as if he took a furtive pleasure in the antics of his steed and the alarm they excited.

Then, before Denis could command his coolness sufficiently to order the horse shot, George of Antioch wheeled like a flash and galloped off straight toward the banner of Jacques d'Avesmes, where he disappeared amid the horsemen.

In a rash fit of rage Denis shouted to his archers:

"Shoot! Shoot! Kill us the minstrel!"

The order was obeyed at once by the archers, regardless of the consequences; and a flight of arrows and quarrels whizzed through the air after the Syrian, who had almost reached the front of the Constable's column.

Not a shaft struck him in the flurry and excitement, but something else happened which Denis had not foreseen. Several of the arrows, missing the minstrel, continued on their course into the ranks of the royal cavalry and wounded several horses and men.

He was apprised of this by hearing a furious shout of rage from the advancing column and the loud voice of the Constable roaring:

"Clear me this rabble from the streets! Crush them like eggshells!"

Without more ado the squire ran into the stable-yard with his men, barring the door behind him as fast as he could, and had hardly done so before the thundering hoofs of the chargers clattered on the stones in front of the house, as the columns of the Constable and Gaston de Coucy met in the street.

"Master of Coucy," he heard the thundering tones of Jacques d'Avesmes proclaim, "some of thy men are in this house, and have wantonly shot at the guards of the Duke of Orleans. They must be given up for punishment at once, sir."

Then he heard Gaston say, in a deprecatory sort of way:

"There must be some accident. We will pay the blood-money if any hurt is done."

As soon as Denis heard that he ran into the house, threw open a window that looked into the street, and leaned out, crying:

"My Lord Constable, 'twas a mistake. That Saracen magician, George of Antioch, is the one we shot at, and he hath turned the arrows on your men. We are blameless."

"We want that man a prisoner," was the only reply deigned by the Constable; to which Gaston, with unexpected firmness, replied that he could not give up his squire, save to a fair trial.

The Constable looked at the array of lances before him and seemed to calculate on the chances of a contest between the two parties. Then he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Then the duke will forbid thee any further mingling with the tournament and compel thee to leave the city. Not even the Master of Coucy can hope to defy the whole power of France."

Gaston looked up at Denis, who made him a rapid sign of intelligence, and then answered:

"We are ready to leave the city, if his grace orders it. Surely we have not received so much hospitality in Orleans that we should long to stay here. We will go—to-morrow if you will."

This last time he appointed in obedience to another secret signal from Denis, between whom and his master a perfect understanding existed.

The Constable then pointed to the damages inflicted on his troop. One man had an arrow stuck in his left arm near the elbow-joint, and three horses had arrow-wounds of more or less severity.

"We will pay at once any fine that the duke imposes on us," said Gaston, eagerly. "If that is not satisfactory, I will leave two knights as hostages for the payment of the fine."

"Give them to me, then," replied the Constable, rather sulkily, and two of Gaston's kinsmen were turned over to the custody of the white banner.

Then the parties separated, the Constable riding off toward the lists with his hostages, while Gaston made his men dismount in the streets, he himself entering the house to see Denis.

When he heard who had been taken and how near Denis had been to killing George of Antioch, he was delighted.

"Let us get out of the city this very night," he said. "Now we have got old Baldwin safe, we will put the rack to him but he shall tell us what all this plot is about, and what this vagabond Syrian expects to do to the Master of Coucy, if, indeed, he does not mean merely to draw a thousand marks from me for his master, Bou Sheer. Let us go away now, Denis."

"Not so," suggested the squire, shrewdly. "I have another plan in view, which will bring better results."

"And what is that?"

"Peter the Hermit is here, and he preaches at vespers, in the Cathedral, this very night."

"And then?"

"Why then, all the people in the town will be there to listen to him."

"Still, I do not understand. What is all that to us?"

"Simply this: the night will be dark. Last night showed us what we could do in the dark."

"Yes, yes; but why will the vespers at the Cathedral help us more than anything else?"

"Because the Lady Adeline is in the hands of the church, and is sure to be there with the bishop's retinue."

"But how will that benefit us?"

"Simple enough, my lord. We must have at least three hundred men in that church in dark clothes, and all colors except those of Coucy. These men must be there early in the first of the crowd, and stay together in the nave near the choir. When the service closes comes the sermon, and there is always a bustle to get closer to hear it. That is the time for us to get near the place where the lady is. Three hundred men with one will behind them to guide them, can go where they choose in a crowd."

"And when we get near her, what are we to do then?" asked Gaston, more puzzled than ever.

"Wait! Wait till the benediction is given, and the crowd is leaving the church behind it. Then is our time to crowd the lady out from among the priests and sweep her away."

Gaston started, and uttered a cry of amazement and horror.

"What! violence in a church! Why, it would be sacrilege! The lightnings might smite us dead in the act."

Denis looked at his master in silence, with a strange expression. The squire's intellect was clear, logical and skeptical beyond the average of his age, and he had hardened himself in disbelief the more he had graduated in selfish cruelty. Gaston, on the other hand, was full to excess of all the superstitions of his time. He was a type of the religious murderer and thief of all ages and creeds, who expects to escape the consequences of immoral conduct by extra attention to his religious duties, and vows a bushel of candles as penance at a favorite shrine at the moment that he handles the purse of the traveler he has robbed and assassinated.

Where the squire only saw a convenient opportunity to get possession of Adeline's person without a serious struggle, Gaston, in his superstition and guilt, beheld an angry Heaven darting its lightnings on his head for the sin of sacrilege.

The squire, however, knew that his master's scruples were only skin deep where they conflicted with his interests, and addressed himself boldly to the task by saying:

"There will be no violence in the church, my lord, and no sacrilege committed. All that we shall do in the church is to crowd round and separate the bishop's party from the rest of the people. Not till we reach the church door and are out of the edifice in the dark, do we aught else. Once there, we carry the lady away to her lawful husband, whom the church itself hath pronounced her lord, and bear her to camp and so to Coucy, whence she escaped before."

Gaston listened in silence with a pleased expression to the oily sophistry of Denis. The plan pleased him, and promised success. It was agreed between them that they should separate before evening, and that the knight with his banner was to remain outside the city in camp, with only a small guard to protect the tents from marauders, but leaving it to be understood that he was there with all his force, while the greater part of the men should really be hidden away in the city and ready to join in the attempt that night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VESPERS OF ORLEANS.

THE Cathedral of Orleans was filled with people that night to hear Peter the Hermit preach after vespers. This service was usually held in the afternoon, lamps and candles being expensive luxuries in medieval times, and night services consequently rare. But during the continuance of the great Field of Honor Louis of Orleans seemed to be resolved to beggar himself by his extravagance if need be rather than incur the reproach of stinginess; and when he asked the bishop for a late vespers during the week to accommodate those who had been present at the tourney as long as daylight lasted, he cheerfully agreed to pay the expense of lighting up the great cavernous nave of the church with lamps and candles as a necessary preliminary.

The nave of Orleans Cathedral, as of all other European cathedrals, was the place for the assembly of the people to listen to mass or vespers, both of which were sung from the choir at the end of the nave. On each side of the junction of nave and choir stretched the north and south transepts, thus giving the whole building the form of a cross, the invariable plan

of all such cathedrals to the present day in the Christian world. There were no seats, the pavement being clear and uninterrupted from column to column, where the people stood or knelt according to the exigencies of the service.

As soon as twilight was settled into darkness, the chimes began to ring and the great arched windows of the Cathedral were illuminated, while the people began to troop through the streets toward the doors opening on the great square. In those days Orleans Cathedral was not the rich and ornate building that it is now. Huge round arches, columns of enormous size and a general somber massive grandeur were its distinguishing features. It was some time before the great doors were opened, and the crowd had grown very thick in front when they heard the bars being withdrawn.

Then followed the usual rush of a crowd to get front places, but the porter noticed that there were very few women in the throng. He noticed also that this front portion of the crowd, as soon as it had entered, remained lounging about near the entrance to the nave, instead of crowding up to the choir as most people would have done. After that the strangers began to crowd in so rapidly that the porter had no time for further comments.

In due time the Cathedral was jammed with people of all conditions, mingling together in the democratic equality imposed by the Roman church in all ages, save where the pew system prevails. The Duke and Duchess of Orleans themselves, with a crowd of noble lords and ladies, stood and waited in the body of the church as patiently as the common people for the service to begin.

At last the organ sounded and the voices of the choristers began the chant, while the priests paced in, two and two, escorting the bishop and themselves escorted by the acolytes, swinging censers to and fro.

Denis Morbec, hidden in the shadow of a pillar in the nave, was watching the whole church keenly, especially the congregation. Not a soul who entered escaped his notice, and he himself was entirely unseen. To be sure he had no view of the ceremonies in the choir, but it must be owned that he was by no means sore vexed at that. He had spies at the transept doors to report to him any entries from those quarters, but so far as he had seen no important person of those he was looking for had escaped him. He had seen pass in on that night St. Pol, Toulouse, Adeline de Coucy in a group of ladies in black, and even George of Antioch, the Syrian minstrel, in his oriental robes so strangely out of place in Orleans.

As soon as the swell of the organ began to vibrate and he realized that all his game was in the church, he moved away from his pillar and began to signal his men to close in, according to a previous understanding.

In a crowd such as that which filled the great Cathedral it is a very easy thing for an organized body of men to press its way, animated as it is by one will. The lords and ladies were all in front near the choir, and a heavy crowd between Denis and them, yet ere three minutes were over the squire and his band, all pushing together, had urged their way to the very edge of that part of the crowd which showed by the glitter of gold and silks that it belonged to the richer population.

Once there, the squire made a halt, for he did not care to expose his scarred face too freely in the throng of rich and dandified knights before him.

The service went on and he watched for his victim. He saw Adeline kneeling in the midst of the ladies with whom she had come, and saw George of Antioch not far off, attended by a man whom Denis recognized at once for Jacques Marcell.

The ex-poacher was clean shaven, and neatly dressed as a servant, in the same colors as his master, but seemed to be totally unarmed, as indeed was every one in the church, except Denis and his followers, who had concealed their weapons in various ways under cloaks, and robes, and pilgrim's gowns.

The squire watched closely that night for any sign of intelligence passing between the Syrian minstrel and Adeline de Coucy, but in vain. Both seemed to be absorbed in their devotions, and neither cast a glance at the other.

The bell rung for the elevation of the Host and the whole congregation bowed their heads reverently before it, and then the choir sung the chant which closed the regular service. No sooner was it over and the priests and acolytes seated once more, than a decided rustle and buzz of interest ran through the crowded nave, while the people, as if by an involuntary motion, began to push their way, a few steps at a time, in the direction of the tall pulpit, which was placed out in the nave.

Denis made an imperceptible signal to his men by a cough, and the whole body, by a simultaneous shove, edged in round Adeline de Coucy and her friends, St. Pol, Toulouse and the Syrian, away from the pulpit, while the anxious watchers took the more favorable places they had just vacated.

Denis kept himself in the background during

this maneuver, not wishing to be recognized; but as soon as it was accomplished he peeped between the bodies of those in front, and met the eyes of George of Antioch fixed full on his own. St. Pol, Toulouse, Marcel and the rest were looking up at the pulpit.

Just at that moment the lean figure and haggard countenance of Peter the Hermit appeared in the pulpit, and all eyes were turned on the famous preacher.

At first his thin face and form, the weakness of his high, sharp-toned voice, made a decidedly unfavorable impression on every one; but as he warmed up and became more animated, he speedily claimed the attention of the audience to himself. Not so completely, perhaps, as in the years when he had wildly implored his hearers to rescue the Holy Sepulcher from the hands of the Turks, and had created a frenzy of enthusiasm throughout Europe, but, nevertheless, Peter the Hermit retained much of the fire and impetuosity of those years, and it shone forth in every look and gesture, as he addressed once more an audience composed almost entirely of Crusaders.

He began by reminding them that the tomb of the Savior, thanks to their efforts, was safe in Christian hands, but went on to remind them that there was work yet to do, and that it lay before them in France.

"Rape and murder in high places, envy, hatred and malice, kinsman seeking the blood of kinsman for the sake of a few paltry fields or castles! When shall we see it stopped and Christians once more dwelling together as brethren? Not a day passes but men are murdered, or women carried away by ruffians in your midst, ye men of Orleans. Only this very day have I seen men, who once wore the Cross, staining their hands in needless and innocent blood, and mocking an old man's gray hairs with chains. Arise, therefore, ye men that saved Jerusalem for the Cross, and swear that these things shall happen no more in your midst. Swear it on the swords you washed in the blood of the heathen by the side of Mount Calvary. Swear that the next crime of violence that is done in Orleans, ay, if it be this very night, you will all turn on the offenders and cut them off from the face of the earth."

Denis turned pale and trembled as he listened to the wild apostrophe, and heard the deep-toned cry with which the old Crusaders answered it through the nave:

"*Dieu le veult! Dieu le veult!*"

He had heard that cry before, deep, short and earnest, full of enthusiasm and terrible ardor, before Jerusalem and on many a field where the Hermit's preaching had roused the masses.

"*God wills it! God wills it!*"

The fervent "Glory! Glory!" of the modern Methodist at a revival; the hoarse shout of "Allah! Allah!" that bursts from the throat of the wild dervish, are something like that ancient rallying cry of the Crusade, but its power has departed, never to return. It was the cry of an age of earnest faith and superstition, allied to much crime and brutality; but it was a terrible sound to the man it menaced, telling as it did of the fanatical power that might be roused against him.

Nevertheless Denis, pale as he was, kept his courage and coolness. He had committed no overt act of violence as yet, and was not liable to vengeance; but he looked round somewhat apprehensively for the Syrian, who, he felt sure, was concerned somehow in the theme of Peter's sermon.

As he turned, sure enough, he met the eyes of George of Antioch fixed full on his own, and knew that his guess was true. He realized also that Louis of Orleans must have engaged the monk to preach on the subject he had taken, which was also true.

The duke had become so disheartened and disgusted at the private quarrels continually breaking out around him that he had almost resolved to discontinue the tournament unless he could find some means to introduce harmony in the camp, and he had enticed the ascetic from his Hermitage for the purpose of testing his eloquence once more in a good cause. Nothing else would have drawn Peter away from his seclusion, for he was one of those characters not unknown in any age, but common in those days of violence and cruelty, who acquired a profound disgust at the selfishness of the world and had lost all ambition to excel in its pursuits. In his day it was said that Peter had been a knight, noted for daring and famous in camp and court, who for some crime that weighed heavily on his conscience had left the world and vowed himself to celibacy and pilgrimage.

However that may be, when once the Crusade in which he had played so important a part was over, he had retired to the woods as silently as if he had done nothing; and here he was in Orleans, preaching in his old fiery style against the sins around him.

Denis saw that the whole assembly was growing restless and excited under the old familiar war-cry of the Crusade. The men were repeating it louder and louder, while the women began to look frightened.

When the Hermit thundered out his last ap-

peal to all to swear vengeance on the disturbers of the peace, he was answered by the shout:

"We swear! We swear!"

Then came the clash of spurs and mail on the pavement as all the men fell on their knees with upraised hands, and Denis, not to be out of the fashion, knelt, too.

The Hermit looked pleased and triumphant as he surveyed the kneeling throng. He had been less than man had he not felt some triumph in the success of his oratory. He raised his hands above them and solemnly pronounced the benediction; then descended from the pulpit.

It was a proof of the strength and persistence of the mind of Denis Morbec, that his first act as he rose from his knees with the rest of the congregation was to signal to his men to close in. Already the rush from the church was beginning, as the volatile French nobles, forgetting all about the sermon as soon as it was over, turned and began to push and struggle for the door.

It was a comparatively easy thing in the midst of this crush for the followers of Coucy to close around Adeline and her little party in the rear of the crowd, separating her from St. Pol and Toulouse, and hurrying her and the few frightened women that attended her toward the door. Denis had discovered that one of these women was Arlette, and guessed that the others were lay-sisters of some convent, who had not taken the full vows of retirement, in whose charge she had been placed by the Bishop of Orleans to go to church.

He tried hard by signs to induce his men to inclose George of Antioch and his follower, Marcel, in the trap which he had laid, but the Syrian was too wary. He had evidently suspected from the first that Denis had some sinister object in view in coming near him, and was careful to keep aloof, watching.

He alone had seen Denis, and he alone had penetrated the secret organization that held together the followers of De Coucy, otherwise undistinguished.

Denis, disappointed of his double prize, judged rightly that it would be dangerous to try and seize the oriental Christian in the church; therefore he only hurried his other prisoner, Adeline, the faster to the door. His men putting their hands on each other's shoulders, cut their way through the dense mass in front without any difficulty, and in a few moments more the squire was in the dark street. Once there, he dashed through between the files of his own men, seized Adeline's arm, and at a given signal the whole party took a slow trot; hurrying down the street to where they knew they would be safe from pursuit. The frightened nuns were dropped on the way, and all might have been well but for one thing.

Denis had forgotten that, the moment his men left the crowd and moved in one body, light or dark, their true character would be revealed. He had also forgotten George of Antioch.

The Syrian minstrel no sooner witnessed the rush from the church and the dark body that was pressing along through the street, than he beckoned to Marcel and St. Pol, who were near him; and in another moment Denis heard behind him the loud cry:

"Down with the Ravishers! God's justice on crime!"

Coming right on the heels of the sermon and hearing the regular tramp of De Coucy's vassals as they moved away down the street, an electric shock seemed to pass through the crowd, for instantly arose counter cries:

"Sword and pike! Down with the Ravishers! Dieu le veult!"

Windows were thrown up and heads emerged, while a vast throng of people began to rush down the street after the now fast retreating and frightened vassals of Coucy.

But Denis had calculated on some difficulty in getting away from the city, and had not prepared his measures ill. Horses were waiting for the party with a litter, at Bonhomme's house in the Street of Black Lions, and Adeline was hurried into the litter, which set off at a gallop down the street toward the city gates, before the advance of the great crowd had reached the other side of the square.

As Denis, with a small party of mounted men, galloped off, he shouted to the other men:

"Disperse into the crowd! Gain all the time you can."

The advice was so well obeyed that the organized body of vassals disappeared in a twinkling, and when the crowd came to the Street of Black Lions in pursuit of the imaginary foe, they found it empty and deserted, while the horse-litter containing Adeline was at that moment passing through the city gate to the camp of De Coucy.

"Two of my birds are caged, now," quoth Denis to himself. "We will see about George of Antioch to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIX.

GASTON SHOWS HIS TEETH.

THE next morning there was trouble in Orleans. The news spread about that Duke Louis of Orleans had issued an order during the night that no man should enter or leave the city with-

out permission; and the brilliant retinue of the Constable of France was seen clanking along up and down the streets, paying visits to all the noblemen, while squires and seneschals were flying here and there gathering the followers of each noble together to their quarters. Some excitement was also created by the rumor which said that a Saracen magician, pretending to be a Christian, was riding with the Constable and instigating these measures.

It was indeed George of Antioch who rode beside Jacques d'Avesmes, and he it was who had been the most indefatigable of all the searchers on the previous night for the lost Adeline.

He must have known who had stolen the lady, judging from his close watching of Denis Morbec in the church, but somehow he never went near the house in the Street of Black Lions.

So in the daytime he seemed to be engaged in suspecting every one else except the real author of the mischief, while the Constable's emissaries were questioning everybody they could find as to where they belonged. Thus it happened that by ten o'clock when the tourney opened all the streets were clear of soldiers, the retainers being gathered in their quarters; and then it was that the Constable made a sudden descent on the Street of Black Lions, and found Jean Bonhomme's house full to overflowing with drunken men-at-arms and archers, without any apparent discipline or subordination, and with no visible leader present.

The consequence was an immediate and wholesale arrest of the whole body, who were so drunk as to be incapable of resistance, and who marched to the cellars of the Hotel de Ville, where they were to be confined, singing bacchanalian songs and boasting aloud how they had cheated the Duke of Orleans and taken their liege lady out of the power of the magicians.

No sooner was this arrest over than the Constable, now no longer accompanied by the Syrian, but leading a strong escort, rode out to the camp of Gaston de Coucy, giving notice as he went that the order was repealed, and that all were now free to go where they pleased.

Gaston de Coucy was found in his tent unarmed and reposing himself, while not more than fifty of his men were in camp. He looked quiet and calm, though his eyes had a furtive, uneasy look, but he rose and greeted the Constable of France with great courtesy and offered him wine.

Jacques d'Avesmes, however, declined even to dismount from his charger, which he had reined up in front of the tent, and demanded, gruffly:

"Where is the Lady Adeline de Coucy?"

Gaston raised his eyes to heaven with a piteous look.

"Ah, where indeed? My Lord Bishop of Orleans parted the wife from her lord, and where she is now I cannot tell. Would I could!"

"My lord," replied the Constable, in a sharp tone, "these excuses will not avail you. We know that it was your squire Denis with a party of your men that carried away the lady from the midst of the Cathedral last night. He was seen and recognized by one who knows him. Where is he now?"

"On the way to the Castle of Coucy," was the reply of Gaston, accompanied by a sardonic smile. "I found that I had some property that was not safe here, so I sent it home under his charge. When does the tilting begin to-day, my lord? I would fain see a better lance-play than we had yesterday."

Jacques d'Avesmes looked at him a moment in considerable anger, but the countenance of the knight was as imperturbable as ever.

"I suppose," said the Constable, in the hope of arousing him to some anger, and so getting the truth out of him, "that you think because you have stolen the lady unawares you are safe. Not so, my lord. Every man of yours to-day within the walls of Orleans is a prisoner in our dungeons."

This taunt had the desired effect, for it made Gaston start. He had not counted on such a suddenly vigorous policy against the men he had left in safety.

Jacques d'Avesmes saw the start, and observed:

"You are foolish, my lord, to play at edge tools with Louis of Orleans. He is a kind prince and a merciful, but he brooks no private quarrels on his lands. Come, where is the lady? Send her back to the lines at once, or the Bishop of Orleans may be induced to curse thee by bell and book."

Gaston shrugged his shoulders with another piteous look.

"How can I send back what I have not got? Search the camp, my Lord Constable, and if you find any trace of the lady, or aught concerning her, you are welcome to her. For my part, I have not seen the lady since the bishop took her from me."

This was indeed literally, though not in spirit, true.

When Denis had dashed into camp the night before with the horse litter, Gaston had not looked inside the vehicle. He knew he could trust his squire, and had hurried him away with fresh horses and every available lance in camp, on his journey to the Castle of Coucy,

leaving his master with nothing but a slender guard of grooms and couteliers to hold the camp till Denis came back.

The Master of Coucy had counted confidently on being rejoined in the morning, as soon as the gates were opened, by his men in the town, but the sudden news of their arrest opened his eyes to the fact that, in seizing Adeline and Baldwin, he had unwittingly placed himself in the duke's power.

Cogitating over these things, with the stern eyes of the old Constable fixed on his face, he began to feel very uneasy, and to wish that Denis was near him once more to advise him in his dilemma.

Old Jacques d'Avesmes began to be impatient. "If you will not restore the Lady Adeline to the bishop's care, I am obliged to do my duty, Master of Coucy. You are my prisoner."

Gaston started back in anger and dread. "Your prisoner! What have I done? Who dare arrest the Master of Coucy in his own camp?"

"I dare," answered the Constable, haughtily. "Prepare yourself to accompany me before the duke."

What Gaston would have said in answer is problematical had not, at that moment, a large troop of horse trotted into the camp from the country outside, at the head of whom rode the missing squire, Denis himself.

The Master of Coucy saw him and became much agitated internally. He was glad to see his squire and counselor, but uneasy about his sudden return, though he felt sure from Denis's confident manner, that he had placed Adeline in safety.

With these thoughts agitating his mind, he waited till the squire arrived, and the Constable, equally astonished and satisfied at seeing the principal culprit in his power, ordered his men out into a line to receive the oncoming cavalry.

Denis had with him nearly a hundred spears, but the Constable possessed more than twice that number, and the Master of Coucy realized that he was in no position as yet to play the bully, as he dearly wished to do. He had divided his forces and was paying the penalty for his mistake.

No sooner had Denis come up than the old Constable rode up to him and cried out:

"Halt, Master Squire, I arrest you, in the name of France!"

"For what crime?" asked Denis, in a tone just as loud.

"That thou shalt know before the duke," answered the Constable, sternly. "Give up sword and lance and follow me at once. Master of Coucy, you are free to follow or remain as you list. This man is the culprit."

Denis looked doubtful for a few moments, but when he considered the heavy and imposing cavalcade of Jacques d'Avesmes, he saw that it was useless to resist, and made a virtue of necessity.

"I have committed no crime, and I am no vassal to the Duke of Orleans," he answered, in a sullen tone; "nevertheless, as a good Frenchman, I yield to the orders of the king's brother. I yield me."

"Therein thou doest well," was the reply of D'Avesmes. "Come with me."

Then Denis was carried away in the midst of the royal troopers, but not before he had made a secret sign to his master to follow.

In a great hurry Gaston was armed and mounted and set off at a rapid trot after the royal troop, which he overtook at the city gates and followed into the city.

They rode along the streets to the Hotel de Ville where they found the duke ready to mount his horse and proceed to the tournament, and where Gaston immediately entered a loud complaint against the insolence with which he had been treated in his own camp by the Constable, ending in a bold demand for the release of his men confined in the Hotel de Ville.

Much to his surprise, for he had expected resistance and rebuke from the prince, his demand was instantly granted by Louis of Orleans.

"The Squire Denis Morbec, who was recognized while in the act of taking away the Lady Adeline from the custody of the church, will be held a close prisoner," was the verdict. "The rest, being but vassals obeying their lord, will be released. When the Lady Adeline is restored to the care of the Bishop of Orleans the squire will be released—not before."

So saying, the duke mounted his horse and set out for the lists, leaving Gaston to his own resources in the city, and feeling very like a blind man who has lost his guide when deprived of the advice and suggestions of his squire.

The Master of Coucy was only allowed to say a few words to Denis, and was obliged to see that worthy disappear in the recesses of the Hotel de Ville, to be replaced by the crowd of drunken retainers who were released by the same order.

The town of Orleans was very quiet that morning. The unusually stringent measures taken by the duke to catch the perpetrators of the last night's outrage had succeeded and the very nobles who were grumbling at the restrictions laid on them in the early part of the day

were the first to admire the success of the plan now that the restrictions were removed.

The tournament recommenced as gayly as ever in the fields outside, and Gaston seemed to be alone in his ill-humor.

He roughly ordered his men to their camp and went to the house of Bonhomme, for which it seemed as if he had no further use now.

He spent the rest of the morning in setting things in order, got his men-at-arms all together once more in camp, set a small guard of archers in the house over which he established one of his kinsmen, Sir Renault de Coucy, as governor, and then set off for the lists, to see what was to be seen there.

He found that many single combats had taken place during the day, and that the Count of Toulouse had quietly assumed the responsibility of the deeds done by his false representative, whom Gaston strongly suspected to be none other than George of Antioch, the Syrian. In this guess, as our readers are probably aware, he was not so far wrong.

When he arrived at the lists one of the first persons he saw was the very Syrian minstrel to whom he had taken such an antipathy; and, still more galling to his pride, George of Antioch sat on the left hand of the duke, with whom he seemed to be conversing on terms of complete equality.

Gaston ground his teeth as he looked; for the longer he saw George of Antioch the more he became convinced that the Syrian was none other than Bou Sheer himself, in disguise. Then Gaston, who was none too bad to be very religious, felt his Christian bile rise against the notion of an infidel Saracen presuming to come among noble knights who had borne the Cross, and especially at the surprising infatuation which permitted a Christian prince to show favor to such an unrepentant Pagan, who was moreover a wizard.

In all this it must be admitted that Gaston de Coucy acted according to his lights and that his feelings were as genuine as those of many a murderer who goes to the gallows full of religious exaltation.

He rode through the crowd of nobles that lined part of the lists and had the pleasure of observing that they treated him better than the day before, while the glances of hostility thrown toward George of Antioch revealed the cause of their change of behavior.

These worthy but bigoted warriors, very few of whom could write their own names, were outraged by the presence of the Syrian, whom they also believed to be a Saracen. So strong is the influence of dress.

George of Antioch, in long robes and turban of scarlet and lemon-yellow, with his dark face and long black beard, looked an Arab chief from head to foot, and the old Crusaders could not stomach that.

They had heard, through the common rumor of the camp, that this Syrian minstrel, as he gave himself out to be, who never played a note or carried a lute, was a bitter enemy of the Master of Coucy, who owed him a thousand marks for work done at Jerusalem.

This alone was enough to give them a certain bias in favor of Gaston, for having cheated a Pagan; and the idea of a Saracen suing a Christian knight for money, no matter how just his claim, was abhorrent to all their ideas of religious duty.

Thus it came about that the same men who had been sneering at Gaston for betraying his kinsman in battle were now willing to take him by the hand, though they fully believed he had sold that kinsman to a Saracen, just because they also believed that he had cheated the Saracen in the bargain and that the infidel had come to claim his own.

Some of them did not hesitate to say as much openly in the lists, and Gaston's arrival was the signal for the clamor to increase in intensity, so that at last it happened that the murmuring became loud among nobles and spectators and went so far that the two knights who were to tilt next on the programme wheeled their horses and rode away from their stations, swearing that they would not break their lances to amuse a scurvy Saracen.

When things came to this pass and the high-spirited French nobles were well angered, the thing could not be long hidden from the duke, and finally the Constable D'Avesmes rode up to his master and told him in a low tone that the nobles would all leave the lists unless the Saracen wizard were sent away.

CHAPTER XX. THE SYRIAN'S RIDE.

WHEN the duke heard what scandal was created by the presence of George of Antioch, a slight smile crossed his face and he said to the Constable:

"Let the heralds proclaim through the lists that the Syrian knight by my side is no Pagan, but as good a Christian as any here and bearer of letters to our brother the king and ourselves from the most noble the King of Jerusalem."

Jacques d'Avesmes bowed and gave the requisite orders.

The first time that the herald cried his news he was listened to with eager attention, but

when he repeated it, as usual, for the better information of all, he was interrupted by a storm of hisses and cries of anger, which showed plainly that the hearers did not believe him.

"Down with the Saracen spy!"

"We want no Syrians!"

"Away with the black-faced dog!"

Such were a few of the epithets which ascended from the field, and the duke began to be annoyed at their persistence.

George of Antioch, who had remained quiet and impassive all this time, now suddenly rose to his feet and said to the duke:

"Your grace has been good to me so far, and I cannot repay the kindness by bringing your grace into trouble for me. I will depart at once, and only ask that your guards will protect me till I mount my horse."

"I like it not," answered Louis of Orleans, in a low voice. "Why should you be driven away, when a word from me might change all this at once? Let me speak it."

"I beg your grace most earnestly to do no such thing," urged the Syrian, in a low tone. "My time will not come till this tourney is happily run, and if your grace wishes to see justice done any earlier, the Field of Honor may be drawn to a close in time therefor."

"It shall be," answered the prince, in a firm tone. "This insult hath broken the back of the heavy-laden camel, and they shall see that Louis of Orleans is lord of his own towns. Farewell, my lord."

The duke rose from his seat and bowed to the minstrel, who on his part knelt and kissed the hand of his host, then moved from his seat and swept from the grand stand with the air of a prince.

When he reached the place of exit outside of the lists, however, he saw that his perils were by no means over, if not rather begun. The whole of De Coucy's train of men-at-arms were waiting before the stable in which his horse stood, and the men were obviously watching for him.

This fact was put beyond a doubt by the yell of triumph which they set up as soon as they saw the scarlet and yellow robes of the Syrian at the back of the lists.

Gaston heard the yell and saw George of Antioch from his own post within the lists; and he longed for Denis to be there in command of the troops, to kill this disturbing element in his life.

The Syrian minstrel paused a moment and looked down, then put a whistle to his lips and blew a long signal, which was responded to by Jacques Marcel from below in the stables.

The stout poacher appeared, leading a pair of horses, one of them the slight Arabian of his master, the other a tall, heavy Norman war-horse. George of Antioch waved his hand to him to stay near the stable door, pointing to the menacing line of steel-clad warriors outside, waiting to pounce on him.

Jacques nodded and remained still, and the Syrian waited patiently, standing on the top row of benches, till he heard the "clank! clank!" which told him of the approach of the Duke's Guards.

In a moment more a knight of the house of Orleans, bearing the white banner of France, and attended by a small guard of men-at-arms, rode in between him and the vassals of Gaston, while their leader went up to Sir Denis de Coucy, one of Gaston's kinsmen, who commanded the retinue outside, and gave him the duke's order that the Syrian was not to be molested, on pain of treason.

While they were talking, George of Antioch quietly descended from his place and mounted his horse, and Jacques Marcel climbed on his own tall charger.

This deed was hardly done when they heard Sir Denis de Coucy say, in answer to the Orleans knight:

"We know our duty to our liege lord, sir, and we owe no homage to Orleans. Let the king come here, and we take his orders: none lower. Yonder wizard hath stolen away one of our vassals. See him there on the big horse. Forward, men, and seize him."

"To the town, Jacques, quick! Leave me!" cried George of Antioch, in a tone of some excitement. "I will lead those fools a chase they will repent."

As he spoke he spurred his Arab and dashed out of the inclosure straight toward the men-at-arms, waving his hand defiantly.

As he had anticipated, the whole line rushed at him, hoping to catch him before he could clear the narrow space between them and the lists, and leaving the other way free for Jacques Marcel, who was not slow to avail himself of it, and galloped away for the city as hard as he could tear.

As for George of Antioch, had he not been mounted on an Arabian horse he might never have seen another day. His swift charger was compelled to do its very best in the few steps that lay between it and the open ground, to avoid being crushed by the heavy chargers of the men-at-arms.

Sir Denis de Coucy got within six feet of the flying steed as it passed close to the barrier, and cast his curtal-ax with all his might at the

Syrian's head, with unerring aim. But George of Antioch saw the weapon coming, and bowed his head with a sudden duck to escape it; while Sir Denis, not being able to check his horse, ran into the barrier and was thrown by the shock, pitching on his head with a violence that effectually stunned him for a time and checked the pursuit.

But George of Antioch did not seem by any means anxious to escape. On the contrary, when he found that the men-at-arms had halted over the body of Sir Denis, he wheeled his horse and galloped back, calling out the names of several of the foremost and bidding them remember the day they left their master at Jerusalem.

"Come on, then, traitors and cowards!" he cried to them. "I have your master's head! Take it if you can!"

These taunts, similar to those with which the vassals of Coucy had been greeted, ever since they came to Orleans, by their old Crusading comrades, roused their ire so much that again they began a scattering pursuit, which the Syrian encouraged by keeping his horse at an easy canter, just near enough to make them think they would overtake him the next minute, but always evading them. Had they been provided with any sort of missile weapons he could not have performed this feat, but as it was he led them on for more than a mile, spurring their panting and sweating chargers to full speed all the time, till they were in broken ground and among a series of morasses, through which only a narrow pass existed. Then he gave free rein to his Arabian and galloped away from them, leaving several of the horses stalled in the morass.

He had led them that way with a view of losing them, but after he had crossed the morass and galloped down a few lanes he found that he had lost his own way, and was in a part of the country entirely unknown to him. Had the land been open, he would have had no difficulty, but it was a deeply inclosed country with high hedges bordered with trees, winding lanes, running brooks, and a general air of quiet rustic beauty that showed it had not been much fought over. Every now and then he would come on some gray old farm-house, half-hidden in the trees, where one or two dirty, white-headed children would toddle to the hall-door with their grandmother, to stare at him as he passed; but not an able-bodied man or woman was to be seen. All had gone to the tournament, as he rightly surmised, for which he was not sorry, as he felt that his rich Oriental robes, while they had answered his purpose well, so far, had now become a source of positive danger to him.

As he was thinking over the tangled web which fate seemed to have wound for him since his coming to France, the sound of a bell in the distance tolling the summons for prayer struck on his ear, and George of Antioch drew rein at the edge of a gentle little valley, in the midst of which stood the gray walls of an abbey, from which the bell was ringing.

He looked at the sun and realized that it was the summons for "prime" or midday prayers, and remembered that after prime it was the custom in most abbeys to have the midday meal.

By this time, wandering among the fields, he began to have quite an appetite, and determined to apply for food at the convent, where a meal is never refused to any that ask it for charity.

But it suddenly struck him that to obtain entrance into an abbey would be even more difficult for him in his present dress than to return to Orleans unhurt. He therefore stopped at the edge of the hill, rode into the shelter of a thicket near by, and stripped off his turban and long robes. Then it might be seen that under the peaceful guise in which he appeared to the outer world George of Antioch had been well protected, for he disclosed a suit of complete chain mail and a plain round helmet, hitherto covered by robes and turban. With great care he unsaddled his horse, folded his garments neatly and laid them under the deep saddle where they were completely hidden by the rich housings, and then drew from a pouch at the saddle-bow a hood of mail which he drew on over his helmet and fastened to his hauberk.

When his preparations were completed and he went back to his horse, all trace of the Saracen had disappeared from his outward man. He was simply an ordinary knight in perfectly plain armor, his long black beard hidden away in the close mail-hood which covered his chin up to the lips, while the bars of his visor hid his face from view.

He proved also to be not devoid of offensive weapons, though he had no sword, but the short mace and long dagger that he carried would have been good for any chance encounter, save with a lancer. The only remains of Orientalism in his general appearance were those of his horse-furniture, and these would not attract attention at any distance.

Thus disguised, George of Antioch mounted his horse and rode boldly down the valley to the abbey, where he halted before the gate and pulled the rope of the big bell with a resolute hand.

In a moment more the little wicket at one

side of the gate was opened, and an old man looked out, demanding in cracked tones:

"Who is it that rings and what do ye want?"

George of Antioch looked curiously at the old man, who wore the leathern coat of a peasant instead of a monk's cowl, and asked:

"Cannot the brethren give food to a knight who has lost his way to the Field of Honor at Orleans and wishes to be fed and put on the right road?"

The old peasant opened his jaws and showed his toothless gums in a hearty laugh at the question, and as soon as he could command his face asked in his turn:

"And where have you come from, most noble knight, that do not know that we have no brethren here, but only sisters?"

The Syrian started.

"What! is this a nunnery?"

The old peasant grinned again but in rather a rueful way.

"An' you were here, as I am, for years, gardener to the ugly old—I mean most holy and noble ladies—you would not need to ask the question."

"And what is the name of the sisterhood?" asked George of Antioch.

"Marry, this is the Convent of St. Ursula of Orleans, sir knight. The most noble lady, Jacqueline de Coucy, known in the faith as Mother Elizabeth, is the abbess; and we have sisters from the noblest families in France within our doors. I am the porter and gardener, as I have been for forty-five years come St. Bridget's day."

The old porter straightened out the curve in his back as he said this and looked very proud. He had grown to associate himself entirely with the convent he served during his long probation, and was proud of its aristocratic clientele.

But the utterance of the name of the abbess seemed to produce an effect of recognition on George of Antioch, who immediately asked:

"Is it the Dame Jacqueline de Coucy that was once lady of honor to the queen of King Philip?"

"Ay, ay, of course. Who else? There is but one Dame Jacqueline in France, grand-aunt of the Master of Coucy, the proudest noble in France. Sure the Coucys use this convent as 'twere their own house. Only this morning we had one of their ladies brought here, who will stay till the Master has finished with the tournament."

The garrulous old porter, who seldom saw a male face, and who dearly loved a gossip, might have gone on thus for an hour, when a sharp female voice called out from the interior of the convent.

"Pierre! Pierre! Who is at the gate? Why dost thou loiter there all day?"

The old man grinned and pointed his thumb over his shoulder with a wink as he said to the knight:

"That's old Sister Ursula, Mother of the novices. Eh, what a temper! Well, what shall I say?"

"Tell her," said the Syrian, "that a knight lately come from Palestine, with letters from King Godfrey of Jerusalem, desires to see the lady abbess in the convent parlor to present the house with a piece of the true Cross, blessed by Pope Urban."

The old man nodded and toddled away. Within five minutes after George of Antioch was in the convent parlor, bowing low before the wrinkles and dignity of the haughty old abbess Mother Elizabeth.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FOURTH DAY!

THE third day of the contests on the Field of Honor had closed with the usual number of victories and defeats, when the city was stirred with a new thrill of excitement by the proclamation through the duke's heralds, of a change in the programme.

His most Illustrious Highness (majesty was not then used as a title for kings) Philip King of France had announced his gracious pleasure to be present at the festivities given by his nephew, the Duke of Orleans, and as the king's stay was necessarily limited to three days, the tournament was to be compressed into that period.

All the conquerors of the previous days were to be matched together as rapidly as possible, and the third day was to terminate in a grand *mêlée* in which the knights were to fight under the banners of the two best men of the day before.

This announcement gave universal satisfaction to the nobles who were beginning to find their quarters at Orleans both narrow and expensive. To none was it more welcome than to Gaston de Coucy, who had begun to wish he had never come at all. Deprived as he was of the advice of Denis, who still remained a prisoner at the Hotel de Ville, he was anxious and uneasy all the time. He had found out from the men of the train who came back with Denis that the squire, instead of taking the Lady Adeline to Coucy as he had been ordered, had carried her to the Convent of St. Ursula of Orleans, presided over by a relative of the Mas-

ter of Coucy; and he felt comparatively easy on that score, but on every other he was decidedly uncomfortable.

George of Antioch, the Syrian, had utterly disappeared, but the Master of Coucy was by no means sure but what that troublesome "heathen," as he called him, was still lurking somewhere in disguise. He had not heard another word about Eustace since the memorable appearance of the Mad Squire at the banquet, and none of his retainers had caught a glimpse of him, though they had watched St. Pol's quarters closely.

Nevertheless Gaston had an instinctive feeling that Eustace must be in the city, somewhere or other; and he feared him almost more than he did George of Antioch, for there was no doubt of the Christianity of Eustace, and the cry of "Saracen" could not be raised against him.

Therefore Gaston felt much relieved at the idea that he would soon be able to leave Orleans and the vicinage of his enemies to return to Coucy, where he was on his own ground. He knew that Adeline was safe with his grand-aunt, the abbess, who held her duty to her family above even that which she owed to the church, like many another well-born ecclesiastic, male or female. As for Baldwin, he lay in irons in a tent in the camp outside Orleans, securely guarded by a dozen stout men-at-arms, who could be depended on to execute their master's orders to the letter and in full.

But before he left Orleans he had determined to make an effort to get his squire out of confinement, and with that object demanded an audience of the duke before the tourney opened for the day.

Louis of Orleans received him with courtesy, but replied to the demand of the Master that his squire had been seen and recognized in the heinous crime of abducting the Lady Adeline from the care of Holy Church, and that he could not be released till the lady was restored.

At once Gaston denied the whole thing, and called on the duke for his proofs of the accusation.

"Who saw my squire at any such work?" he asked.

"The Syrian knight, George of Antioch, recognized him and called on the Counts of St. Pol and Toulouse to help him, but ere they could rouse the people your squire had fled, carrying off the lady."

"And I say, my lord duke, that this Syrian knight, as you call him, is no knight, but a foul heathen magician who has abused your grace's confidence, and that I defy your grace to bring him forward, when I will prove it on his body."

The duke turned to a page in waiting and ordered him to go and bring the Syrian, Gaston waiting with some impatience and more anxiety the result of the summons.

Presently the page returned with the Constable d'Avesmes and the news that no man had seen the Syrian gentleman since he left the lists on the day before, when he was embroiled in some quarrel with the retinue of a noble lord outside.

Gaston looked triumphantly at the duke and observed:

"I said that your highness had been abused, and I repeat it. I demand the release of my squire, as the right of a French noble. It is not fitting that Christian gentlemen should languish in dungeons at the accusations of heathen wizards, who forge scrolls from the King of Jerusalem to deceive Christian princes."

The prince was about to answer him, when a slender little page, richly dressed in red and gold, entered the room, crowded as it was with courtiers, and knelt before the chair of state, offering a letter.

From some reason or other the duke flushed crimson at the coming of the page, and Gaston looked hard at both.

It seemed to the Master of Coucy that he had seen the face of the page somewhere, though he could not tell where, and though it was a face of great beauty, almost too beautiful for a boy.

The duke read the scroll hastily, and then beckoned to Jacques d'Avesmes, to whom he whispered some words.

The old Constable nodded gravely and left the room, after which the prince turned to Gaston and surprised him by saying:

"Your squire shall be set free at once; but you are required not to leave Orleans till the coming of our liege lord, Philip of France, who will be here to-morrow."

Gaston bowed low and could hardly conceal his exultation. He left the presence with great outward respect, and within an hour had the pleasure of greeting Denis in his own camp, just as the trumpets were sounding at the other side of the city for the opening of the tourney.

Denis had been considerably sobered by his imprisonment, and when he heard what had transpired on the occasion of his release, he looked grave.

"There is some trap in all this, my lord," he said, shrewdly. "If we remain here till the king comes, we shall remain as prisoners. My advice is to break camp this very night and flee to Coucy, or 'twill be the worse for us. We ought never to have come here."

"And why not flee now?" asked the Master, doubtfully.

"Because we can be seen from the city, and they would follow us at once. The night is the cloak for the fugitive, my lord. Let us go to the tournament to-day and let all the world think we are ready to stay a week."

Gaston saw the soundness of the advice and obeyed it, while Denis on his part busied himself during the day in getting things ready for a move, withdrawing from their city lodgings all the men save a few who were to remain till the closing of the gates, when they were to leave the city singly and repair to camp to join the rest.

As Gaston passed Orleans on his way to the lists with the greater part of his retinue, he encountered a column under the white banner of France, coming from the city and taking a southerly direction down the valley in which Orleans lies. He paid no particular attention to them, the party not numbering more than fifty spears, beyond an idle wonder where they were going. A train of forage horses behind the column seemed to indicate that they were in search of hay and grain, which were already growing scarce in the city under the pressure of the crowd of mounted men.

He arrived in the lists without seeing anything remarkable, and found them full of knights and nobles, attracted by the new programme, which allowed several knights to engage on a side.

One tilt had just been finished, and the Constable d'Avesmes told his herald to call the next list, among which were the names of Walter, Count of Toulouse, and the Master of Coucy.

Gaston rode in and took his place with easy confidence, for he knew himself to be a better lance than Toulouse, who was too fond of the pleasures of the table, and therefore more or less unsteady.

When the trumpets sounded, as he had expected, he proved victorious, for though Toulouse broke his lance fairly on Gaston's shield, the worthy count lost his own stirrups under the shock of Gaston's lance and went over his horse's quarter in ignominious defeat.

The Master of Coucy felt more easy in his mind, now that he had conquered two of his antagonists, and he longed to meet George of Antioch, to serve him in the same way. But the Syrian was nowhere to be seen in the lists, and Gaston had to wait.

Four more contests, between six knights of a side, followed the one in which Gaston had experienced such good fortune, and then occurred a lull, for the list was closed.

The lull was interrupted by the sound of a distant trumpet, and a little cloud of dust swept toward the lists, out of which emerged a figure singular, even for those days. It was that of a horseman of very great height, mounted on a huge dapple-gray Norman stallion, that overtopped every charger in the vicinity. This tall knight appeared to be as thin as he was long; but with enormous size of bone, for his shoulders were very broad.

He was dressed in a shirt of mail, red with rust and dirt, with a leopard-skin wrapped round his waist as a sort of sash or scarf, but his legs were bare as well as his feet, and both were seamed with scratches as if he had lately ridden through brambles. But the most remarkable part of his equipment was his head-gear. Unlike the fashion of the day, he wore long hair and beard, both wild and shaggy; and his sole protection, if such it could be called, was a sort of cap of wicker work set with feathers and wild flowers, in a manner that strongly suggested lunacy.

This wild-looking horseman rode barebacked, guiding his big charger with a straw rope for halter, and he brandished in his right hand a club of portentous size, that looked as if it had been rent by force from a tree without aid of knife or ax.

Gaston knew the figure in a moment, and shrunk back into the midst of a crowd of nobles, as Eustace—for it was none other than the Mad Squire—galloped headlong into the lists and reined up in the middle, shouting:

"I am Eustace, squire to the Master of Coucy, who died under the Cross as a good knight should. Gaston de Coucy is a coward and a traitor, and here stand I to prove it on his body."

Then the Master of Coucy indeed had reason to tremble. As long as he was not publicly insulted there was room to escape from the madman's notice, but now he knew that every man in the lists had heard the defiance and would cry scorn on him if he did not take it up. Already people began to look at him from all round, as if to see how he would take it, and he felt that there was no evading the contest.

How Eustace had got there, no one seemed to know, but there he was, and Jacques d'Avesmes seemed to be afraid of him, as was everybody, after the exaggerated rumors of the mauling he had given Denis.

Every one could see that he was mad and dangerous, and Gaston suddenly conceived an idea that he as quickly executed.

While Eustace was shouting in the middle of

the lists, he kept turning his horse and waving his club, so that at times his back was turned to Gaston.

Seizing one of these opportunities, the treacherous knight set spurs to his own horse and galloped at the madman with his lance couched.

The act was so sudden and the fear inspired by the maniac so great that no warning cry came to tell Eustace of his danger till Gaston was close on him, and then he wheeled his great horse and raised his club with a howl of delight, coming to meet De Coucy.

Had Gaston swerved from his course that moment, so as to allow Eustace to close with him, the Master of Coucy would soon have been overthrown by the gigantic strength and ponderous club of the maniac; but as it was he came straight on, with his lance set full at Eustace's breast, unprotected by shield or aught save the thin links of the rusty chain-mail.

Utterly devoid of fear, the Mad Squire rushed on, waving his club, and received the lance-point as if he felt it not, though it spitted him through and through just under the right shoulder. He even writhed up the shaft of the weapon to get closer to Gaston, and discharged a tremendous blow at the Master's head with his huge club.

Gaston had only time to drop his lance and swerve his horse as the club descended, instinctively raising his right arm to ward the blow, which, nevertheless, beat down his guard, nearly breaking the limb, and glanced off from his helmet, stunning him so that he reeled in his saddle.

But once more, as in the fight with St. Pol, the good steed saved the bad master, though not in the same way. The big gray horse, ridden by Eustace, proved clumsy and overshot its mark, while Gaston's charger wheeled away, carrying its master out of danger, and there was the poor maniac in the midst of the lists transfixed by the lance which he was dragging about, yelling out wild threats and defiance, while the blood streamed from him.

But even the insensibility of a madman could not endure such torture long. Presently Eustace looked down as if amazed and saw what had happened, when, with a wild laugh, he plucked forth the lance and actually waved it aloft with both hands, as if to cast it like a javelin.

The effort was too much. Mad as he was, the flow of blood sobered him and quenched his fury, for, after swaying to and fro in the saddle a moment, he fell heavily from his horse to the ground and there lay motionless as if dead.

Now was Gaston's time, and he was not slow to avail himself of it; drawing out his curial ax and galloping toward the prostrate man. He would certainly have killed him on the spot had not the Constable and his guards thundered over the lists to the protection of Eustace, accompanied by the Count of St. Pol, from whom, as the count explained, he had escaped in the night, as mysteriously as he had entered Orleans.

Where he had procured his horse and the apology for armor that he wore no one knew, but Gaston was obliged to content himself with a protest against the protection accorded to one whom he called his "vassal, and rebellious vassal, too."

It was all in vain. There seemed to be some sinister influence against Gaston whenever he tried to kill one of his enemies in public, and he was obliged to be content with the knowledge that he had disabled Eustace from any further damage at present.

While the men of St. Pol were taking away the wounded man on a hand litter, came another trumpet, for it was the time now for all sorts of combats, under any or no rules, and into the lists rode another figure as different from that of Eustace, as could be conceived.

The new-comer glittered from head to foot in steel and gold, while his helmet dazzled the eye as it reflected the sun, but in the midst of his shield appeared the strange device of the severed head of a man, dripping with blood.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BLOODY HEAD.

It needed no intuition to tell Gaston who was the knight that now entered the lists. He felt sure that it was the Turk, Bou Sheer, himself, come in the guise of George of Antioch, to proclaim his crime, disgrace him among men, and drive him from his heritage. He knew the trim and gallant figure, so tall and graceful, swaying to every motion of the dancing charger he rode.

Even his plain armor, intertwined with gold rings, but undistinguished by any gay surcoat, as were the rest of the knights, did not conceal his identity from Gaston. He knew the slender black limbs of the bay charger, so different in their symmetry and cleanness from the clumsy legs, straight pasterns and bushy fetlocks of the Norman chargers in use by all the other knights.

The strange knight's Arabian looked too slender for its work, and yet it was dancing to and fro under its mailed rider as if the weight were mere play.

But what made Gaston more certain than anything that Bou Sheer was before him was

the ghastly device on the other's shield. He had heard from his men that the Saracen had taunted them with the boast, "*I have your master's head*," and he knew that no one but Bou Sheer could possibly have the head of Guy de Coucy.

Perhaps he had brought with him the horrible trophy, "dried by some Eastern witchcraft," thought the knight, "and will exhibit it to the king and the nobles while he tells his story of the bargain at the Brook Kedron."

"Never shall he do that," thought Gaston, half aloud. "He has come near me for the last time. I will grind the bones of this dog to powder."

As he muttered he rode in among his men, dismounted and bid them look to his harness thoroughly, for he was about to tilt against the stranger.

Meanwhile into the lists rode the Knight of the Bloody Head, parading his singular device so that all could see it, and attracting universal notice on account of his peculiar glitter of appearance. In the crown of his helmet, and fastening the plume, this singular person bore some jewel of wonderful splendor, that flashed brilliant rays of light all over the lists and added to the interest he inspired.

He advanced to the herald and said something to him, then saluted the Constable of France with grave courtesy and rode up to the challengers' end of the list. It might be seen then that the lance he bore was long and much more slender than those used by most of the knights, which were made of beechwood, easily splintered, on purpose for tilting. The usual tilting-spear, moreover, instead of a regular sharp blade, usually bore a round plate for point, set with three studs to prevent it slipping off the opponent's armor.

The blade of the stranger's lance, on the other hand, was nearly two feet long, and glittered viciously in the sun, as if calling out "Danger!" to any that wished to face its point.

Presently the herald shouted aloud in the lists:

"Here comes the good knight and devout Christian, George of Antioch, Knight of the Bloody Head, and defies any gentleman in France who saith that he is a Saracen. He will fight such a one now with sharp weapons only and to the uttermost. Who dares take up the challenge of George of Antioch?"

Instantly there was an eager chorus of cries:

"I will!"

"And I!"

"Let me tilt with the Pagan!"

Forty or fifty knights rode forward as if eager to engage, and the Constable had to exert his voice to its full extent to secure order.

"One at a time, gentlemen. You must draw lots for first choice."

The Syrian knight, who had kept his visor down all this time, now rode toward the crowd of excited noblemen, all eager to have a chance at "the Saracen wizard," as he was called by all, and raised his visor, disclosing to all a face no longer bearded but close shaven, and with dark eyes.

"Gentlemen," he cried, in clear, ringing tones and in French so pure as to preclude the idea of his being a Saracen, "the man that fights me to-day will hold a dear accounting with his Maker to-night in Purgatory for belying a Christian. Come forth, the best knight of you all, and let who will dare follow after him."

His ringing and defiant tones were full of bitterness and indignation, as he continued:

"I thought that this was a Christian country, where a Christian knight, fresh from the tomb of Christ, would be welcomed; but as it is—come forth, your best knight, and let us get it over."

While he was talking, the voice of reason seemed to have been whispering to the hot-headed young nobles, for at the close of his speech only one rode out—a tall, heavy man, with a hard, resolute face, full of cruelty and determination, and said:

"I am Ranulf de la Morte, who has taken more Moslems to hell than any man that crossed the wall of Jerusalem. I will fight thee."

George of Antioch looked at him in a stern, angry way.

"I have heard of thee," he answered. "Thou art the man that kills babes at the mother's breast, so they be Moslems. I will fight thee and God defend the right."

He crossed himself piously as he spoke, and rode to the end of the lists, while Ranulf de la Morte, with a sardonic grin on his shaven face, went to his own side to await the signal.

There seemed to be no sort of proportion or equality between the combatants as they sat on their horses, and it appeared as if Ranulf must have an easy victory. His tall burly frame was knit into compact strength and his armor was very heavy and thick, consisting of heavy plated cuirass, arm and leg-pieces, besides the ordinary hauberk. His lance was nearly twice as heavy as any other in the lists, and his horse was as colossal as its master.

The Syrian on the other hand, while nearly as tall as Ranulf, was much more slender and elegant in figure, and his armor seemed to be no

weight at all. His lance, while not one third of the thickness of that of Ranulf, was at least four feet longer.

Light as he and his weapons looked, there was yet a quiet confidence in his air that told of experience in warfare; and he waited for the trumpet signal with perfect calmness.

Presently it came and both knights started for each other, Ranulf thundering along with leveled lance, the Syrian holding his long weapon by the middle above his head, his Arab charger skimming over the plain like a bird.

With a slight turn of the wrist his bridle swerved the horse away from the Frenchman's lance just before it touched him, and then both wheeled around like a flash after Ranulf, as his clumsy horse thundered by, unable to check its impetus.

The bright blade of the long lance was seen to thrust itself viciously forward at Ranulf as he strove to check his horse, entering him once, twice, thrice, in the side, just above the junction of the breast and back-pieces of his cuirass—in the armhole.

The big Crusader was seen to writhe in his saddle with pain, throw up his arms and fall from his horse, while the long blade of the Syrian's spear was all dripping.

Leaving his victim on the ground, dead or dying, George of Antioch waved his spear and galloped up to the group of nobles lately so anxious and defiant, shouting:

"The man that says I am no Christian lies like a cur and dare not back his words. Who next can be whipped into courage of ye all? Let him come!"

This challenge was not long of being accepted, one may be sure, though had it been made in a less taunting and insolent manner, it might not have been taken up.

As it was, four or five men rode out in answer, and George of Antioch beckoned to the heaviest man among them, the one possessing the oldest and hardest face.

This was Sir Giles de Narbonne, a Crusader noted for being as rapacious and cruel to helpless Jews for money as Ranulf had been wantonly cruel to women and babes from mere delight in slaughter. Such characters were only too common in the first Crusade, coming as it did in an age of gross brutality, and unable to civilize every one it met.

George of Antioch beckoned to Giles of Narbonne to take his place, saying in a tone of cutting sarcasm:

"The Sieur de Narbonne is jealous for the honor of the Holy Sepulcher; so much that he would murder every Jew in France to get gold to fill his coffers and bring him safe from the Crusade. Here I am, no Jew but a good Christian, ready to teach Narbonne a lesson in greed, as I have taught De la Morte what death means."

Narbonne took his place without a word of reply, but it was observed that his face was marble pale as he did so.

The trumpets sounded once more, and again the champions parted for the encounter. This time Sir Giles took warning by the fate of his predecessor and did not urge his horse to full speed, keeping it at a canter ready to wheel at a turn of the wrist.

George of Antioch, on the contrary, urged his charger to its full speed, going at least three times as fast as the heavy steed of Narbonne, and holding his lance no longer poised in the middle, but couched under his arm at its very extremity.

The consequence was that when they met, the velocity of the Syrian more than made up for his deficiency in weight, while his long lance reached Narbonne before the French knight's shorter weapon was on the level of the Arab charger's head.

The keen, murderous blade took De Narbonne in the throat, just where the mail-hood joined the hauberk, ripped up the fastenings and tore through flesh and bone, bearing De Narbonne back over the croup of his charger, transfixed like an eel on a trident, and stone-dead.

The Syrian rode on and wheeled his horse round the body, tugging at the lance to get it free, in which he succeeded after a little effort, and then rode up to the lately defiant French nobles once more.

"What say ye, gentlemen, am I a Christian yet or not?" he asked in a bantering tone, to which Jacques d'Avesmes, the Constable of France, who had joined the group, responded:

"If thou art a Pagan, then may all our Christians turn as Pagan as thou art in battle. Thou art as good a knight as any I ever saw."

But here a stout young knight, who had hitherto been quiet, spoke out:

"He fights more like a Saracen than an honest Christian knight. Away with these tricks of fence. Let him break a fair lance fairly."

In answer to this grumbling, George of Antioch laughed outright, and said in a more plausible tone than he had used before:

"I am a Christian from Syria, my lords, and as ye should know, the Syrian Christians, being brought up in the midst of Saracens, learn to fight in the Moslem manner. Nevertheless, since the coming of King Godfrey to Jerusalem, our people have begun to practice the

knightly exercises, and I myself have been accounted somewhat good at them. My present weapons, as all may see, are those of a Saracen emir whom I slew in fair fight, and this horse was his, which I took from him. If any gallant gentleman will see me now provided with a heavy horse and lance, fit for tilting, I will adventure what I can to oblige the knight who wishes to run a course with me."

All this time Gaston de Coucy had been waiting and watching the issues of the combats which came before his own, and the longer he looked the less he liked the idea of challenging George of Antioch.

Now, however, when he saw that knight mount the charger lately ridden by Ranulf de la Morte, and wave aloft a common tilting-spear to oppose young Bertrand du Vallon, the Master of Coucy became anxious to take a hand in the business himself. As long as the Syrian kept to his peculiar oriental style of fighting, Gaston felt afraid to engage him, but as soon as he returned to the familiar Christian style in which Gaston knew himself to be a proficient he determined to encounter him.

Meantime Bertrand du Vallon, full of ardor and hope, for he was a stout, athletic young fellow, couched his lance and thundered on to meet George of Antioch.

The Syrian, mounted on a tall, heavy war-horse and covered with his shield, bearing its ghastly cognizance, waved the lance lately borne by Ranulf de la Morte and galloped forward full speed.

Both splintered their lances up to the very hilt, but that of George of Antioch swayed Du Vallon over backward till his plume swept his horse's croup.

The Syrian's heavy charger, less affected by the shock than that of Du Vallon, pressed on, and George of Antioch caught up the curtal-ax at his saddle-bow and dealt Bertrand such a knock on the crown as he passed that the young fellow fell senseless to the ground.

Then it was that George rode up to the French group and once more asked:

"What say ye? Am I a Christian or not?"

And Gaston de Coucy came out with his visor down, shaking his lance as he said:

"Saracen wizard, I defy thee and will fight thee to the uttermost, here and now."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAST BATTLE.

To the surprise of every one, the Knight of the Bleeding Head seemed to hesitate ere he answered Gaston. His visor was down so that the Master of Coucy had not yet seen his face since it had been shaved clean.

Presently he said:

"I do not wish to fight thee now, Gaston de Coucy. Our time has yet to come."

"I defy thee and thy foul spells," was the angry answer of Gaston. "Our time is now. Take thy place and distance, for this day is free to all who have quarrels to settle. Is it not so, Constable of France?"

Jacques d'Avesmes gravely bowed his head.

"Until the sun sets," he said.

"Therefore, fight now and fight thy best, ere I drive thee from the lists with blows of the lance like a dog to his kennel," cried Gaston, in his usual hectoring way when he felt himself to be on the winning side.

As he spoke he shook his lance as if he would have executed the threat, when George of Antioch suddenly raised his shield and held it up before Gaston's face.

The effect was electrical.

Though it was but a rude daub that was painted thereon, still it had all that fidelity of likeness so often observable in otherwise stiff and awkward pictures of early medieval times. It was undeniably like the face of the dead Master of Coucy, all pale and blood-stained, with a few drops still falling from the red cavity of the neck; and the likeness fairly appalled Gaston.

He gazed at it with pale face and quivering lips as George of Antioch spoke in a deep voice of warning:

"Gaston de Coucy, repent, ere it be too late. I have the Master's head. Perform thy promise, and pay the thousand marks promised in the valley of Kedron, or dread the anger of God, double traitor that thou art."

His tones were so low that none but Gaston heard and understood them fully; but the Master of Coucy recovered his calmness after awhile, and with it his anger came back.

Lifting up his lance with a savage oath, he brought it down on the Syrian with all his force, splintering the beech shaft over the shield which George held up to ward off the blow.

It did the other no injury, but it seemed to rouse him to active anger, for he immediately raised his curtal-ax and rode furiously at Gaston.

Had not Jacques d'Avesmes and his guards, who had been watching the scene curiously, thrust themselves in between the two at this moment, they would have closed in deadly strife without further preliminaries; but the thundering voice of the Constable recalled them to their senses as he roared out:

"Peace, gentlemen, in the king's name!"

What! Do ye think this is a wine-shop, where villains brawl with clubs? Shame on thee, Master of Coucy, for an unknighly blow by surprise. Back to thy place in the lists, and see that thou bear thee as becomes a man in a fair battle."

There was no more question or hesitation now. George of Antioch, by the ordinary rules of the tourney, had become possessor of the horses and weapons of the two knights whom he had slain, and was in nowise answerable for their deaths, which had occurred in a fair contest.

Now therefore he changed the big horse which Ranulf de la Morte had ridden for that of Giles de Narbonne, a more compact and better bred animal, handy to rein and spur. Then he took a fresh spear and waited for Gaston de Coucy.

The Syrian seemed resolved that day to show that he was unequalled by any in skill at knightly exercises; for although he might have resumed his Saracen weapon, which had done him such good service already, he took no advantage of Gaston save that of his agility.

It was plain as one looked at the two champions, waiting for the signal, that Gaston was the heavier of the two and as full of activity as he was of strength, while his horse was the best heavy charger in the lists.

At last the trumpets sounded, and away went both knights as hard as they could tear.

Just as every one expected to see a cloud of dust and a terrible shock, the Syrian's charger was seen to leap to one side with an almost imperceptible motion, while its rider's body swayed in the same direction.

The next minute one might see the lance of Gaston de Coucy, which had been held straight for George of Antioch's head, slip off the side of the polished helmet, while the Syrian's lance, went all to splinters up to the very gauntlet, and bent the proud Master of Coucy back over his horse's croup so that he lost both stirrups, caught wildly at the air with both hands, and finally rolled on the ground.

In another moment he was up again, running after his horse, while George of Antioch, seeming to disdain the pursuit, calmly pulled up and watched him.

The well-trained animal came to its master without any trouble, and Gaston climbed up and at once clutched for his battle-ax, which hung at the saddle-bow in its usual place.

No sooner had he done this, than George of Antioch set spurs to his horse and rushed at him with an appearance of concentrated ferocity which he had not yet exhibited.

Gaston, on his part, stung by his late defeat and feeling that all his future prospects were bound up in some way in the defeat of the mysterious Syrian, came to meet him with equal fury, so that for several blows it seemed as if the enmity of the two men was only eager to discharge itself in assault, with no thought of defense against the enemy.

The Syrian, it is true, used his shield to some extent, but Gaston, with fierce, sweeping two-handed blows, clove the iron plate in two and nearly crippled the left arm of George of Antioch, who thereupon closed in with him.

A moment later, both struck simultaneously, and each blow reached its mark, the helmet of the other.

Gaston's head-piece, albeit a good piece of work from Milan, was beaten in with a deep dent by the edge of the heavy weapon, and the Master of Coucy swayed and reeled in his saddle, dropping his ax.

The helmet of George of Antioch seemed to be of better materials; for it showed no dent, though the Syrian reeled about in a manner that showed he, too, was more or less stunned.

Then the horses brought them so close together as nearly to crush the legs of both and rouse them by the pain, when each grappled the other and they fell from their horses, locked in each other's arms.

Once down, both struggled up again with the same inextinguishable hate, and then it was that Gaston seemed to realize for the first time that he had lost his ax, for he turned and groped for it, holding out his left arm and shield as some protection.

He was, however, so stupefied by the blow which had dented in his helmet, that he was unable to find the weapon, and George of Antioch plied him with great sweeping blows of his ax, beating down his guard, cleaving his shield, and finally driving him in flight and ignominy all over the field, amid the unconcealed laughter of the spectators.

When matters arrived at this stage, the Constable and his guards galloped in between the two, and separated them from each other, Gaston being adjudged vanquished and his armor forfeited to the Syrian minstrel, knight, wizard, or whatever he might be.

It was a bitter dose for Gaston to swallow, but he began to be cooler as soon as he was out of the immediate contest, and he thought to himself that it was only the accident of having lost his battle-hatchet that had exposed him to this last defeat, and that, had he found it in time, he might have made a better figure.

He realized, in the short wrestling-match

which had taken place between them, that he was the stronger of the two; and did not feel so much humiliated as might have been expected.

In haughty silence he stripped off his sword-belt and began to throw down his weapons of defense on the field, as if to close the hateful ceremony at once; but the Syrian knight called out aloud before all the rest:

"I take no arms from Gaston the traitor. Our quarrel hath yet to be settled between us, and it is a quarrel to the death."

So saying, he turned away, and found Jacques Marcel, now in full armor with his visor down, waiting for him with his horse.

Honest Jacques up to this time had not dared to make his appearance openly in the lists for fear of being recognized and claimed as a vassal by some of Gaston's followers, in which case even the protection of George of Antioch would not have availed him against the relentless severity of the feudal law.

The easy conquests made by his master that day had, however, enabled Jacques to disguise himself thoroughly; the armor of Giles de Narbonne fitting him passably well; and as soon as he found somewhat to enable him to put in his appearance as a squire, he entered the lists with perfect boldness.

George of Antioch took the horse offered him by his squire and rode away, leaving the lists with no more ceremony than he had entered, even while the heralds were proclaiming that the "Good knight George of Antioch had proved himself a valiant Christian against all comers, and that no man, on penalty of the displeasure of the most noble the Duke of Orleans, should venture to doubt it or insult the noble knight."

Indeed it was plain that a great change of sentiment had taken place with regard to the Syrian since the morning. His unexpected and brilliant series of victories over knight after knight, closing with the ignominious discomfiture of the renowned Master of Coucy, had much to do with this change, but the difference of dress had nearly as much.

Ignorance and prejudice go hand in hand; and it was the oriental robes and long beard of the Syrian that had first prepossessed the people against him, reminding them of their ill-bittered foes, the Saracens. The moment that George of Antioch appeared shaven and shorn, in the same dress as that of other Christians, and using the same weapons, their opposition began to relent, and his victories completed the change.

When he rode out of the lists into the crowd this time he was followed by acclamations instead of hisses, and when the Constable threw his truncheon in the air to signify that the games were over for the day, a great portion of the crowd was already on the move for Orleans.

Gaston de Coucy, despite his mortification at the public defeat he had undergone, was not too proud to resume his armor and sword and to remount the horse he had fairly lost in the tourney.

He rode slowly out of the lists, all alone amid the crowd of nobles, who seemed to have turned against him once more, and outside the lists came across Denis, who was waiting for him, and who had heard of the strange turns of fortune of that day.

Gaston learned that Eustace had been taken to St. Pol's house, where he was said to be lying in a dying state, at which report Denis felt a great sense of relief. The squire told him that all was prepared for their secret departure at night, the city lodging having been vacated by all the men without giving the landlord any notice, and that no one seemed yet to have any suspicion of the intention of the Master of Coucy.

Then Denis heard the details of the defeat of his master by George of Antioch, in the usual palliating way in which a beaten man tells the story.

"I own that he is a good lance and that he caught me fairly by the trick which he used when I aimed at his head. He could not do that again, for I would take him in the shield next time. But in the bout with the battle-ax, 'twas only the goodness of his head-piece that saved him, while mine gave way. I am the stronger; I will fight him again; and next time I will beat him."

"For a Turk, who hath only learnt our exercises and language since he was a man, our Bou Sheer hath made great progress," said Denis reflectively. "He fights as well as any Christian, they say."

"He does," admitted Gaston; "but we will see how he fares the next time."

They rode away to their camp where they found everything in preparation for return to Coucy, the sumpter-horses and wagons loaded, the tents alone standing empty till after dark.

As they passed the south gate of Orleans, they encountered the same train which Gaston had met in the morning, headed by the royal banner, and now followed by a very long string of asses and mules, laden with hay and sacks of grain, which blocked up the way for a mile or more.

Gaston, impatient to get on, cut his way rudely through the train about the center with his own retinue, thereby separating the mules from their leaders and causing considerable confusion in the road, as the obstinate creatures mingled with his own horses, snorted and brayed, kicked and generally conducted themselves as badly as mules will when they are bent on having their own way; so that at last he who had cut the mule train in two, found his own train divided by the persistence of the long-eared animals, and was reduced to the alternative of waiting till they had passed or going on and leaving part of his men behind.

He chose the latter course, whereby he missed a sight that might have interested him.

Just at the tail of the train, and guarded by about a dozen knights and men-at-arms, came a mule-litter on the full trot, catching up with the rest, and beside this litter rode the pretty dark-faced page of George of Antioch, on his bay pony.

CHAPTER XXIV. THE FLITTING.

FOR a couple of hours after sunset nothing remarkable happened in the vicinity of Orleans, and by that time it was pitch-dark. The watchmen on the walls of the city could see the watchfires of the many camps glittering in the distance, but noted nothing unusual in their appearance save that those in the quarters of the Sire de Coucy were rather brighter and larger than common.

Nevertheless there were eyes watching the camp of Gaston from the thickets near by, and word was brought to Louis of Orleans in his palace that the Master had struck his tents and was moving off.

The duke raised his eyebrows with some signs of surprise and asked the Constable D'Avesmes: "Is the lady safe within the walls, my lord?"

"She is in the house of the Lord Bishop of Orleans, your grace."

"Then I see not what we can do to hinder De Coucy," was the rejoinder of the duke. "I have done all that the claimant has asked of me."

"So please your grace," said the Constable, gravely, "De Coucy hath yet another prisoner in his camp, a noble knight, whom he has publicly said that he will put to the torture to make him reveal his secrets."

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

"As to that, my lord, I have no power to interfere till my uncle of France shall bid me do so. That is the claimant's part. Is he informed of this?"

"I think not, your grace. It was the men of the Count of St. Pol that brought in the tidings."

"Then let St. Pol and his friends see to it, till our lord comes here on the morrow."

And the duke turned to his supper, for he was thus engaged when the news was brought to him.

The good Constable, who had been much interested in the progress of the intrigues that were going forward in Orleans, hastened to St. Pol's lodgings, where he found the stout count getting his men together and packing up, preparatory to a move.

Toulouse was with him, for that count had brought but half a dozen followers to town with him, all lightly mounted, in his eager rush for vengeance after he had escaped from the ludicrous dilemma in which he had been left by George of Antioch.

Since his mysterious whispered conversation with St. Pol on the evening when Eustace made his sudden appearance in the banquet hall, the count had displayed a remarkably forgiving and Christian temper toward the Syrian minstrel, whom he had been seen conversing with as familiarly as if the two were old friends.

"We have heard thy news, Lord Constable, and are acting on it now," observed St. Pol, as D'Avesmes entered the room. "We also are on the road to Coucy with the dawn, to save our own fields: for an we do not, we may find them harried by that devil of a Gaston, ere we arrive."

"Does he know it?" asked the Constable, significantly.

"Perhaps, and perhaps not. So far he hath told us all the news, but now he is by the bedside of the sick squire, whose blood-letting seems to have cured his brain."

"Then he should be told, straight," answered the Constable, gravely. "This matter concerns him as much as any here. Where doth the squire lie, that I may go to him?"

"I will conduct you myself, my lord," answered St. Pol, and he led his visitor to a little upper chamber, where they found George of Antioch, no longer in his oriental robes, but in the ordinary furred gown of a knight out of armor, seated by the bed whereon lay Eustace, pallid and weak, but with the light of reason returned to his eyes, his luxuriant locks shorn close to his head, and the wild shaggy beard wherein he was wont to rejoice, shaved from his face, which looked as young almost as when he stood before Jerusalem, save for the blue marks of the recently shaven beard.

The squire's eyes were fixed on those of George of Antioch with an expression of great

affection, and he held the hand of the Syrian close pressed between both of his own as he lay there smiling as if quite happy at last.

George of Antioch looked up as the Constable entered, and asked:

"What is it, my lords? Any fresh wickedness of that unhappy one? Our poor Eustace grows feverish with his wound at last, and the leech saith he must not be excited."

"It is nothing bad," answered the Constable, gently. "Gaston de Coucy hath moved camp, and is hastening back to his castle, and these gentlemen are about to follow him to save their fields."

"Let him go," was the calm reply of the Syrian. "He will harry no more fields of Languedoc."

"Now by the mass, I do not care that he shall," answered St. Pol, with a smile of some humor, but rueful withal. "He has a great following of lances, and a village once burnt cannot be rebuilt without loss of money that I cannot afford. I, for one, am away to St. Pol in the early dawn, and I travel my best to reach there before he be ready."

"Therein you are right," was the grave reply of the Syrian. "You and Toulouse have something to lose, whereas I am a landless man and an exile. Nevertheless, I will follow as soon as our poor Eustace is out of danger."

Here the wounded squire joined in the conversation with a voice whose strength showed that he was not yet much reduced by his wound, severe though it might be.

"I am quite safe here, my lord, and the good friars of the bishop's convent will attend me. Why should one like me keep noble lords from their rights and duties?"

"The gentleman speaks well," said Constable D'Avesmes, heartily. "I, myself, will be responsible for his safe guardianship after the noble lords shall have left, and will see that he is removed to the care of the brothers of St. Luke. Let all go forward on their errands without fear."

George of Antioch, who had at first seemed unwilling to leave the sick man, rose up at this and observed:

"Then, my lords, the sooner we leave this town the better. In the morning it may be too late to avert death from our friend."

"So say I," rejoined the Constable, in the same hearty tone; "and if the king himself do not follow to Coucy, I am no true prophet."

CHAPTER XXV. THE CONVENT.

THE late moon was just rising with its diminished orb over the trees that surrounded the convent of St. Ursula when the tramp of horses, clanking of armor and heavy rumbling of loaded wains was heard on the road to the southern provinces, as Gaston de Coucy's column drew up beneath the walls, while Denis the squire rung impatiently at the bell.

There was quite a long delay ere any answer came, and the squire pulled again and again at the rope that hung outside.

At last the little wicket opened, and the terrified voice of the old porter inquired in trembling tones:

"Who is there? In Heaven's mercy, are ye come to sack a convent of holy nuns?"

"No one has come to sack any convent, old fool," answered the squire, as gently as it was in his gruff voice to speak. "Here is the Master of Coucy and his train, and we want the Lady Adeline, whom I left in thy charge only yester morn."

"The Lady Adeline?" echoed the old man, in tones of great amazement. "Why, she is gone. The Master was here himself and the abbess sent her away within an hour of sunset, with a guard of noble knights sent by the bishop himself."

Gaston had sat on his horse by Denis, listening to this colloquy in great anxiety, but now he broke out with a storm of oaths.

"Heaven's malison on the knave! What means he? I have not been here for a year past. Who let the lady go? Open thy door instantly, or, by the blessed cross, I will pull down thy house about thine ears."

How much longer he might have stormed is uncertain, when he was arrested by the grave tones of a female voice coming from high above his head.

The nunnery of St. Ursula was built as strong as a castle, with thick ramparts and battlements running all round it, forming the covering for the cloisters where the nuns walked, and from the battlements came down the voice—one that Gaston knew well, that of his kinswoman, Jacqueline de Coucy otherwise Mother Elizabeth—crying:

"Gaston de Coucy, depart hence, for this is holy ground."

Gaston looked up and saw the white hood and black robes of the abbess on the walls.

"Where is my wife?" he shouted, in angry tones. "Give her to me at once and we will depart."

"We harbor no wife of thine within these walls. Depart in peace," was the cold, stately answer.

"Now by the mass, kinswoman, my squire

brought her hither not two days ago," cried the infuriated Master. "Give her up, or I batter the gates down and search for her."

"Do thy wicked will, if it must be so," answered the abbess, in her cold, stately way. "I tell thee she is not here. Shut the wicket, Pierre, and ring the bell for midnight vespers."

As she spoke, the abbess disappeared from the walls and the wicket slammed to, as old Pierre barred and bolted it.

Left outside in the night, the angry Master of Coucy hardly knew what to do, till Denis, who was always for bold counsels, observed:

"The bishop hath heard of our plan or hath guessed it, and hath sent them word not to give her up. Let us break down the gate and search for her."

But Gaston hesitated.

"It will be sacrilege," he urged.

"Not unless we enter the chapel," was the wily answer, "and these nuns, in keeping apart husband and wife, whom the church hath made one, are guilty of sacrilege, too. We are on the way to Coucy and must have her, or our triumph is marred. It is a desperate time and needs desperate measures. Let my lord be easy. I will give the orders. My lord can turn his back till the deed be done."

The squire spoke in a coarse tone, for he was disgusted with his master's wavering policy, and in a few moments more was off his horse, ax in hand, followed by several men-at-arms, hewing away at the convent gates.

It was a long and tedious job, for they were of heavy timber and iron-bound besides, but the squire never hesitated until he had hacked out the lock and pried back the heavy bolts through the opening thus made.

Then they saw before them the court-yard of the convent, black and silent, surrounded by the echoing cloisters with their round archways.

Not a soul was to be seen moving, and all the inner doors were wide open.

No sooner had the foremost man entered than the great bell of the convent began to toll, and the sound of sacred music came from the interior of the buildings, where still no light was visible.

Followed by a group of his most reckless comrades, Denis rushed in and entered the convent.

He had been in Father Ambrose's monastery before, and knew the general arrangement of these religious houses, much like that of a modern jail, with its long rows of cells opening on a common corridor.

Everything was so dark that he had to return to the train to get torches, after which he re-entered the convent, Gaston steadily refusing to engage personally in the sacrilege, though he seemed by no means unwilling to profit by that of Denis, if it should prove successful.

With the torches the squire made a thorough search of every nook and corner of the convent, but without discovering a single human being, while all the time the bell tolled on, and the nuns continued their chant in the chapel, which he soon found to be in the rear of the convent, with no external windows.

The light streamed into the inner corridor from the half-open door of this chapel, and Denis at last concluded he would search that.

Calling to his men, who now for the first time began to hang back, he advanced to the door, flung it open, and fell back half-blinded by the blaze of light that shone from the candles on the high altar.

The first figure he saw was that of old Pierre, the porter, pulling away at the bell rope in the entry of the chapel, and the reckless squire seized the old man by the collar with his usual brutal violence, and swung him away.

"Stop that cursed noise or I'll slit thy throat for thee, old dotard!" he remarked, as he executed this manly performance.

Then he stepped boldly into the chapel itself, with drawn sword in one hand, his smoking torch in the other.

In spite of all his hardihood, however, the squire halted when he saw the solemn scene before him.

The high altar was blazing with light from its thirteen candles; and on the steps at the summit, with his face turned to the congregation, the jeweled case containing the Host in his hand, held aloft, was Peter the Hermit, in the full canonicals of a priest.

Before the altar, row upon row, kneeling on the bare pavement, were the black-robed nuns with their white hoods, all prostrate on the pavement; for even as Denis entered, the little bell sounded that causes every Catholic to bow the head in reverence, announcing to the faithful the presence of Deity in their midst.

Hardened in wickedness as was the squire, he hesitated a moment before this spectacle, which he had seen so often, and which was associated in his mind from early years with all that was sacred.

Then, with a strange fluttering at his heart, but mastering his fears, he sheathed his sword and advanced into the chapel as the nuns broke into the final chant.

No one appeared to notice his presence as he

stalked in, and he walked forward till he faced the nuns as they rose from their knees.

But the face of Adeline de Coucy was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE RETURN TO COUCY.

THE sun of the second day after Gaston de Coucy had fought George of Antioch in the lists of the Field of Honor at Orleans, was sinking to its rest over the woods around Castle Coucy, when the train of the Master, followed by its rumbling wagons, arrived in front of the gates of the fortress, and Gaston blew his bugle for admission. He was answered at once by the clang of bolts and rattle of chains, as the drawbridge descended over the moat to admit him; while the portcullis, rusty from a week's rest, creaked noisily as it rose in the air.

The seneschal of the castle came forth with a sorrowful and anxious face, bowing to the ground, as if he feared to meet his master, and yet was anxious to propitiate his anger.

On his part, Gaston de Coucy was unwontedly quiet and grave, while Squire Denis, usually a hectoring bully, said not a word of fault-finding to any one, but actually held out his hand to Robert, the seneschal, and asked kindly after his health.

The Master of Coucy rode up to the hall steps and dismounted, but the usual sullen gloom of his face had changed to an expression of apprehension and superstitious fear, which left him no heart to indulge his usual ill-temper.

The seneschal turned and whispered to Denis: "What has happened? Is my lord sick, or angry with me?"

"Not angry, good Robert, but sad," was the unwontedly civil reply. "Tell me how the ladies escaped from thy guardianship."

Robert turned red and pale as he stammered: "Fore Heaven, Denis, I cannot tell. There was a good watch set, and we thought all secure, so I went to bed."

"Well,"—seeing that he hesitated—"what happened then?"

"And in the morning, when I rose, we found the tower door open; Giles Fromard, the sentry, gone; the bridge down, the portcullis wide open; the best horses in the stable stolen, and not a soul left in the tower."

"I thought as much," said Denis, with a smile, half-gloomy, half-sardonic. "As soon as my lord was out of sight, ye all went to drinking, and they bribed Giles Fromard to help them to run away. Well, be it so. We shall all have trouble enough for this, or I mistake me much. The King and the Duke of Orleans, with St. Pol, Toulouse, and the men of our neighborhood, will be here in a few hours to besiege Coucy. Thou and thy comrades may yet hang from the barbican for that drunken bout of thine Robert."

Robert turned ghastly pale at the notion, for the squire had augured pretty correctly. It was true that the whole garrison had been drunk on the night when the ladies and sentry had disappeared together; but it was not true that they had bribed Fromard, for that unhappy warrior had been the first to wake in the morning; and when he found what had happened, he threw away his halberd, took to the woods, and was at that moment many a mile away, concocting stories to impose on some unwary noble, who might take him into his service, instead of giving him up as a runaway vassal to his lord.

Meanwhile Gaston had dismounted and entered the castle, where he in turn questioned the seneschal as to the way in which Adeline had effected her escape. The master at another time would very likely have smote his careless seneschal dead on the spot when he had heard his story, but now he seemed to be strangely quiet and gentle in his manner. He merely nodded his head when Robert had finished, and observed:

"It was to be. Go and see that the store-rooms are full of victuals, for we shall soon be besieged."

The seneschal slunk away with a scared face, and the castle was soon full of the bustle of preparation, while loaded and empty wagons were hurrying to and fro over the drawbridge from the village of Coucy, bringing in hay and oats, flour and pork, quicklime and oil, and laying in all the stores that necessity dictated for a medieval siege.

For Gaston knew well enough that he was going to be besieged. He had not doubted it from the moment when his men came out of the convent of St. Ursula, announcing that the Lady Adeline had really vanished and that Peter the Hermit had solemnly cursed Gaston de Coucy and his squire Denis from the summit of the altar, for the crime of sacrilege, twice done.

From that moment even the hardihood of Denis had abated somewhat; for though the squire was not superstitious, his men were; and some of them had caught the last words of Peter the Hermit, as, one by one, he blew out the candles on the altar, with the solemn imprecation on Denis and his master that "so should their lights be put out in this world and the next."

They had not waited for more, but had fled in dismay, leaving the squire to find his way out by the lurid light of his own torch, that seemed to their superstitious fancies like a glow from the mouth of the Pit of Darkness.

Denis had come forth from the convent a changed man, and had hurriedly communicated to his master what had happened, and how they had uselessly committed the crime of sacrilege.

Then they had set forth on their journey, having lost two hours of precious time and at least ten miles of distance out of the straight road; a loss that was to cost them dear, as they found next day.

When they made their morning halt to bait the horses, and as soon as it was light enough to see, one of the archers brought in the news that the fresh tracks of a large column of horsemen were visible in the road; and both men realized that it must be their enemies on the way to Coucy to intercept them.

They pushed on hastily to the next village, where their fears as to the force were somewhat relieved by finding that it was the Counts of St. Pol and Toulouse, with only a hundred lances, who had passed through; but they also learned that a strange knight was with them, bearing on his shield the device of a *bloody head*, and they knew that their old enemy, George of Antioch, was after them again.

Another piece of news that tended to disconcert them was the fact that the counts in the advance had openly spread the tidings that the King of France and the Duke of Orleans were coming, with the Bishop of Orleans and a large levy of knights, to besiege Castle Coucy and punish the Master for the sin of sacrilege.

After that, they pursued their way with all haste, only delayed by their heavy wagon-train, till they arrived at the castle, as we have already seen.

It was quite dark when the last wagon rolled over the bridge, and Denis came to his master to announce that they were now provisioned for three months; that there was store of arrows and crossbow bolts ready in the towers; and that all was ready for a siege.

"Pull up the bridge, then, and let us wait," was the gloomy reply, as Gaston roused himself from the stupor in which he had been plunged, sitting in his big arm-chair under the canopy on the dais.

Denis gave the necessary orders and came back to find the hall dark and his master still seated in the gloom, brooding.

The stout squire, with all his rascalities, had the one good quality of indomitable courage, which was ready to kindle that of others.

He saw that his master was in danger of losing heart altogether, and feared the effect on the men, already in a state of demoralization through the rumors of excommunication.

To counteract these, he had boldly summoned Father Ambrose from the village; and when that worthy ecclesiastic arrived, cowl and all, Denis had the castle lit up and supper spread in the hall, with the Father to say grace.

The sight of a brown robe revived the spirits of the men, who were already beginning to quail under the influence of superstition, and the supper proceeded merrily enough, with a bountiful supply of wine, under the influence of which Father Ambrose delivered a sort of homily, far from being discouraging, in which he alluded to the fact that Peter the Hermit, "who as all the world knew had never been ordained a regular priest at all," had undertaken to excommunicate the Master of Coucy for seeking the wife to whom Father Ambrose had wed him but a week ago.

"But let me tell you all," said the priest, in his oily tones, "that a curse pronounced by any man save one in regular orders in charge of a parish, or a bishop in his diocese, hath no more effect than a shower of rain on a duck's back. I, my sons, I alone am the pastor of Coucy, and I say that our most noble and worthy Master shall be blessed all the time, and that the curse shall fall on the heads of those wicked lords who have stolen from him his lawful wife, the Lady Adeline de Coucy."

A shout from the retainers made the rafters ring, and Gaston began to smile again—so great is the power of one superstition to drive out the other.

Under the influence of this newly-acquired confidence he swigged off a huge cup of Burgundy, and as the wine warmed his heart and mounted to his head began to be jovial, as was his wont in his cups, being sensible in the midst of all that he must be affable to his men and could not afford to show any of his old ferocious temper.

Denis smiled, well pleased, at the change of scene that his artifice had produced, and then left the hall for a walk on the ramparts to survey all the defenses.

The stout squire was not deceived like his master. He knew full well that Ambrose had been under suspension already, and that, did the bishop ever suspect the outrage of which he had been guilty, the priest would be degraded at once. He knew that the real danger they had yet to run would come from carnal foes, not the fantastic terrors of ecclesiastical curses.

Therefore, having, as he thought, averted the danger of undue faintheartedness from the garrison within by his stratagem, he set out for the walls to see what the foes without were doing.

He found the sentries pacing their posts in gloomy mood, and he stopped to tell each one what Father Ambrose had said in the hall, having the effect of cheering up the poor fellows from their gloom.

Then he ascended the gate towers, which commanded the furthest view of any in the castle, and looked out over the landscape.

It was a fine starlight night, with a light mist curling up from the meadows behind the village of Coucy; but out in the valley, as he had more than half expected to see, there was the sparkle and glitter which told of innumerable watchfires. They stretched away into the darkness, as it seemed to him, for miles, and he became convinced that it was indeed true that the king and the Duke of Orleans were coming to besiege Coucy.

"For St. Pol and Toulouse, with all their powers, could never get up such a host as that," he thought.

He questioned all the sentries as to whether any one had come near the castle since the bridge had been raised, but received a negative answer. The enemy had probably gone into camp some little time after dark, and had not cared to venture into unknown territory before daylight.

Denis descended from the gate-towers and carefully made the rounds of the ramparts. The barrels of quicklime were ranged in order by the battlements, ready to break up and throw down on assailants; while caldrons and furnaces, at regular intervals, laid with wood to light up, showed on what the garrison chiefly relied to repel assailants.

There were great heaps of stones by the *trebuchets* and *mangonels*, to keep the enemy at a distance, while piles of square bolts for the arbalests lay between the ammunition for the heavier engines; and arrows for long bows were not wanting, albeit this last was not a weapon much favored by the French nation.

Denis smiled as he ended his survey and felt much easier in his mind. The castle was indeed well provided against a siege, and its walls were able to defy any battering-ram.

As for mines, Coucy had a wet moat, full of running water from the little river Coucou, and the river itself would have to be drained before any tunnel could be run under the walls.

Therefore Denis felt pretty safe. He knew that the power of the King of France in those early days was merely a matter of love and affection on the part of his nobles, and that this love would not stand the strain of a long siege, when the legal call for a liegeman's service was only for forty days.

"They will think twice ere they press the Master of Coucy hard," he thought, "when they have to live in the same province thereafter if they cannot kill him. Coucy has had sieges ere this, but never a foe has crossed her walls since Odo de Coucy first built the donjon."

He went down to the hall and then visited the towers of the donjon—one at each corner—to see whether they also were in proper condition. He did this not because he had any idea that the outworks of Coucy would ever be taken, and the donjon and its towers be necessary as a last resort, but because Denis was an old soldier, who could not omit a single precaution without violating his conscience.

He was rewarded for his vigilance by a discovery which startled him. The corner tower in which Adeline had been confined had evidently been visited for some purpose with a view to rendering it less defensible; for the lower door, which had resisted so stubbornly the efforts of Gaston de Coucy a few days before, had been taken off its hinges, and the hinges themselves carried away.

Denis Morbec was naturally a shrewd and suspicious man; and this circumstance at once roused his fears that treason was at work in the garrison.

Hastening to his master with the news he was amazed to find that Gaston had ordered this done himself, while his squire was absent collecting provisions; and he gave his reasons in a maudlin manner therefor.

"We have wizards and wizard's wives; and that she-devil Arlette may get back into the castle yet. If she does, fore Heaven, she shall not escape me a second time. I will have no impudent wenches throw dust on me from my own tower windows."

Then Denis heard from his master for the first time the story of the way in which Adeline and Arlette had defied him from the tower on the very day in which Father Ambrose had married them. Gaston had not told it before for very mortification.

In vain the squire represented to his lord that the tower should be put into a condition for proper defense by rebanging the door, all danger of Adeline's entrance and defiance being now over. Gaston was obstinate as a drunken man will be.

"I want no witchcraft hiding in those towers," he said. "If they come from thence with

their spells and incantations, we will chase them to their rat-holes, and they shall not bolt my own doors in my own face."

Therefore the squire was obliged to be content with seeing to the vigilance of the watch in general, and within three hours from that time all the castle household, except the sentries, was buried in slumber.

The last visit made by the squire was to the tower in which Sir Baldwin de Coucy had been thrust the moment the train reached the castle with him a prisoner. The squire found the old knight sleeping as calmly as a child.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING.

It was some two hours after midnight at that period of the month before the moon rose, and when it did so its orb was diminished to less than half the full size. A profound stillness brooded over Coucy Castle, where the sentries stood half-dozing at their posts, and all the lights had been extinguished for some time.

Even the watchful Denis had sunk into slumber at last, thoroughly tired out; for he had ridden night and day with the rest from Orleans.

The fact was that the watch at Coucy that night was slack of a necessity, and the soldiers in the camp of the pursuers—now besiegers—were nearly as much tired themselves.

The watchfires had burned down to a glow of red embers, and the white pavilions stood like sheeted ghosts in the moonlight, silent and devoid of light.

All but one tent in the center of the camp, a great marquee, at least a hundred feet long, in front of which drooped the white folds of the Royal Standard.

Within this grand pavilion, which was illuminated with lamps and flaring torches, was gathered a group of some ten or twelve knights in full armor, around the chair in which was seated a stately and dignified personage, also in armor, who wore over his white hairs a cap of ermine surrounded with a little coronet. All the other people in the tent were bareheaded and standing in attitudes of respect, even to the Duke of Orleans, from which circumstance it might be guessed that this venerable personage was the King of France, which indeed was the case.

The Duke of Orleans, the Constable D'Avesmes, the Counts of St. Pol and Toulouse, with several lords high in rank at the French court, were among the audience, but the most conspicuous figure of all was the Syrian minstrel, magician, knight, champion or what not, George of Antioch, who stood before the king in full armor, no longer in any Eastern fashion, but in the panoply of a Christian knight. Beside him, still pale and weak, but also clothed in armor, stood Eustace Delaval, the lately Mad Squire, whose eyes, sad and serious, were bent on the king like those of any reasonable man.

"Well, my lords," said Philip I, King of France, "ye are aware that I am not personally knowing to the facts in this matter. The present Master of Coucy was quick to pay homage to me on his return from the Crusade, and I never saw the late Master but once in my life. If ye are all willing that the matter shall be tested between these two by the combat and wager of battle, I, too, am willing; but it must be done ere sunset to-morrow, for I cannot waste the time of my vassals and lords to settle a dispute of succession in a case so doubtful as this."

The old king's tones were cold and hard, and he averted his eyes from those of George of Antioch. The Syrian drew himself up to his full height, and his features wore an expression that showed him to be hurt by some meaning in the king's words.

The Duke of Orleans showed by the expression of his face that he sympathized with his uncle, but the Constable D'Avesmes, and all the lords, without exception, looked annoyed and offended.

It was with a voice that trembled a little from a feeling of anger that George of Antioch answered:

"It may seem a small matter to your Grace that a Christian knight should plot with a Pagan to give over his kinsman and liege lord to death, that he may enjoy his heritage; but it seemeth to me that the vows of knighthood violated should be avenged, and that justice is the best duty of knight and king alike."

"It is well, my lord," was the answer of the king, somewhat impatient; "but bethink you that Coucy Castle is a maiden fortress, the strongest in all Languedoc, and that to take it, in the quarrel of another, the king must risk the lives of his vassals like water."

"May it please you, my liege," here broke in the Constable, in his blunt manner; "I speak for every lord here who was before Jerusalem, and who minds the gallant grace of Guy de Coucy. We are willing to stay here till the black traitor Gaston is driven from those walls, if we have to lose every man we have brought with us."

George of Antioch looked round at the other lords present with the tears starting to his eyes.

"My lords, I thank you all," he said, simply.

"When the right comes to its own, I shall not be ungrateful."

Then turning to the king, he continued:

"The Castle of Coucy shall be in the hands of the royal troops by the rising of the sun if my liege will give the orders I request."

"And what are they?" asked the king, in a more mollified tone, for he saw that his most powerful vassals seemed to be a unit in support of this unknown minstrel.

"They are these," was the reply. "Let the camp be roused without sound of bugle or beat of drum an hour before dawn when the night is blackest. Let them leave their horses behind them, muffle their feet and march in dead silence to the gate. They will find the drawbridge down, the portcullis up and the garrison asleep, if I mistake not. Asleep or awake, the way will be open, and I shall be there. If the Constable D'Avesmes, with the Lords of Toulouse and St. Pol, head the column with their men, I will answer for the result, and bid my liege to dinner in the great hall of Coucy."

"This seems reasonable, my lords," observed the king, more cheerfully.

"But how if you fail in your enterprise, Sir Knight?" he added.

"Then, my liege," was the low reply of the Syrian, "it will be because God does not defend the right; and 'tis sacrilege to believe that, for any true knight."

All present crossed themselves in devout fashion, and the king said:

"Be it so, then. Go, and Heaven speed your errand, sir knight. But for the urgent letter of our brother Godfrey of Jerusalem we should not have come all this way to settle the dispute; but as it is, we will let you have your own way once more. Nephew of Orleans, see that the orders are issued, for, to tell truth, my eyes are heavy."

At this broad hint all present bowed low and retired. George of Antioch, when he was outside, grasped the old Constable's hand warmly and thanked him for his brave words in his support, but the veteran only laughed him off.

"'Twas but the selfish desire to get rid of a bad neighbor," he said. "I have had more trouble with that boor, Gaston de Coucy, than with any other man in France, and I would rout him from his rat-hole. God speed you, my lord."

Then the other lords bowed and separated, all except St. Pol and Toulouse. The stout lord of Quiberon Castle seemed to be agitated by some inward struggle as he stood near George of Antioch, and presently the cause came out as he said:

"Thou wast right to serve me as thou didst, the other day, and, had I known who the girl was and what thine errand here, I would never have harmed thee, sir knight; but there remaineth still a matter between us that is not settled. *The way of which we both wot* is now known to two besides thyself, and God knows to how many more they will spread it. Now let us exchange secrets, or how shall I guard mine?"

George of Antioch smiled at the obvious embarrassment of the other as to the secret of his hidden passage, and answered:

"Let it go till to-morrow, and I swear to thee on mine honor as a knight that I will show thee a way to keep thy secret safe. To-night I must hasten, if I hope to do my work."

"Be it so," replied Toulouse, in a tone which was far from being one of satisfaction; "but I hold it no treason to follow thee to-night and find for myself the secret of Coucy."

"Nay, then," was the quick answer of the Syrian, "if my Lord of Toulouse doubts my honor, there is but one way to settle it, and that at once."

As he spoke, he shifted his belt a little to bring his sword-hilt to the front, but St. Pol, who had hitherto listened in silence to the colloquy, broke in:

"Now, by the Mass, Toulouse, this must not be. Ere thou fight him to-night, thou must draw thy sword on me also. I took the girl, and turned her over to thy custody. Hadst thou not tried thy follies on her, the wench would never have known of the secret way. Let it be for to-night, as he says, and to-morrow let him decide the matter as a knight should."

As he spoke he drew his old friend away, half by force, to his own tent; while George of Antioch, followed by Eustace, disappeared among the tents in an opposite direction.

It was not difficult to divine where they were going, since the public promise of the Syrian to place the king in possession of the castle by opening the gates before daylight. The inference could only be that he was to obtain access to the interior of the castle by some secret passage; and the Count of Toulouse was naturally anxious to find out what that secret passage was.

George of Antioch, however, seemed to be determined to balk his curiosity, and soon was lost to sight in the woods behind the camp, where he and Eustace, instead of taking a direct course, made considerable of a circuit ere they came to the mouth of the excavation.

When they came there, just as the moon

topped the trees and shone into the little glade, they found it not untenanted.

Seated on the broken rocks which marked the entrance to an old quarry in which the passage ended were three robed figures, guarded by a man in armor, carrying a huge battle-ax.

Eustace, who had been walking slower and slower, here stopped and leaned against a tree. The Syrian also stopped and asked anxiously:

"What ails my faithful Eustace? Have I taken thee too far for thy wound? How careless I am!"

"Not so, my lord," was the low answer, "but I, too, have a heart, though I be not wed. Tell me, I pray you, for I have been so long wandering the earth, a poor maniac, I have heard nothing of Coucy. Is Arlette Marcel, the sister of the huntsman, still my lady's bower maiden or no?"

"She was with her not three days ago," was the reply of the Syrian; "and, unless I err much, that is she, over yonder."

He pointed to the female figures seated by the mouth of the secret passage. But Eustace still hesitated.

"Knows she that I was demented, my good lord?"

"Nay, by our Lady, an she think the worse of thee for a wound gotten under the Cross before Christ's tomb she is no true daughter of old Marcel the Miller and no true sister of Jacques, faithful to death," was the warm reply. "Come on, my faithful squire, and fear naught, for the morrow sees thee wed to thine Arlette or all of us dead in our harness as becomes good soldiers, or else the Master of Coucy will have found his head and come to his own again. Come on."

Then they went forward as boldly as before to the silent group by the secret passage.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COMING OF THE DAWN.

QUIET brooded over Coucy Castle in the darkest hour before dawn, and even the sentries were fast asleep, leaning on their halberds. The moon was hidden behind a curtain of clouds that had gathered overhead during the night, and the darkness was nearly complete.

Nevertheless, in all this darkness, the royal camp was astir; and the columns of soldiers, as promised by the king, were on their way to the gates of the castle.

Within the building itself a chorus of snores from the great hall showed where a large part of the garrison was peacefully sleeping on the hard stone floor, and every tower had its little quota of men joining in the nasal harmony.

Gaston de Coucy himself was in his own chamber in the upper part of the donjon and Denis was stretched across his master's door, according to the custom of the day. The last thing that any one in Coucy Castle thought of was an immediate assault, for they had not even been summoned yet.

The watchers slept and the sleepers were buried in a profound stupor, while the dark column of French knights and soldiers slowly advanced to the gate.

As they had been promised, they found it wide open and the bridge down over the moat, where the rapid rush and gurgle of the little Coucou effectually drowned all but loud noises.

The Constable D'Avesmes, St. Pol and Toulouse were walking ahead of the men, and were met at the bridge by the tall figure of Eustace, who whispered:

"Have they brought the muffling?"

"Ay," was the whispered reply; and then the men at the head of the column advanced, four or five at a time, casting down bundles of hay and wet straw on the bridge, so as to make a thick soft carpet, over which the soldiers passed in single file into the now empty court.

The arrangement of Coucy Castle was similar to that of all medieval fortresses, the great square donjon with its four towers occupying one side of a court, hemmed in by tall ramparts some thirty or forty feet thick, formed of two walls filled in with earth, the top being paved with slabs of stone. The ascent to the ramparts was by flights of steps from the court itself, the flanking towers in the curtain having separate flights within themselves, and the two gate-towers having separate doors below and above, the first leading into the court, the latter opening on the summit of the ramparts.

In the profound stillness and sense of security with which the garrison of Coucy retired to rest, all these doors had been left open, and the royal troops who now entered the castle had no difficulty in taking complete possession of the outer defenses of the castle.

Their feet were muffled in strips of blanket and sacking so that they trod very silently, and their entrance was assisted by the fact that all the garrison had gone to sleep more or less under the influence of the wine which Gaston had served out lavishly to keep up their spirits.

Everything in this surprise seemed to have been planned with consummate skill, for the different parties of men separated from the main body and filed to their appointed stations without any noise or confusion.

In the meantime the Constable D'Avesmes himself, followed by a deep column of knights and men-at-arms, crossed the court and ascended the steps to the great hall of the donjon. Here also the door was wide open, for the heat was great; and they could see the room crowded with sleepers, lying with their heads against the wall.

A single lamp, hung by a long chain from the roof of the hall above the dais, cast a faint light over the long lines of sleepers, and revealed the fact that most of them had taken off their armor on account of the heat, and were, for the time being, defenseless.

A grim smile crossed the face of the old Constable as he noted the fact, and then he advanced to the dais, followed by his men.

There, in the chair of the Master, in full armor, with his helmet on and visor down, sat a figure point for point the same as that of Guy, Master of Coucy, the day he led the stormers over the walls of Jerusalem. Behind his chair, with a mighty ax over his shoulder, stood the burly figure of Jacques Marcel, in complete armor, and in another chair, beside the likeness of Guy de Coucy, was the Lady Adeline in her bridal robes, attended by Arlette and the Saracen girl Zuleika.

Jacques d'Avesmes made no remark of astonishment at this surprising spectacle, which, indeed, he seemed to have expected, but he walked up to the dais, bowed low to the figure of Guy de Coucy, then to the lady, and said in a low voice:

"My lord, you have done well. The castle is ours beyond a peradventure. Give us our directions, and they shall be obeyed."

"Send to invite our liege lord to enter with the dawn," answered a hollow voice from the closed helmet. "Let the trumpets sound as he crosses the bridge, and be ready against a battle."

The Constable nodded, and turned round to a little page following him, giving the boy some directions which sent him tiptoeing out of the hall.

Then the men who had entered the hall with him formed themselves into lines facing the sleepers, and each softly drew his sword or laid his battle-ax on his shoulder, ready for instant use, after which a deeper stillness than ever fell on the whole castle, the armed knights standing like statues of steel in front of the hapless sleepers in every part of the castle, and in numbers sufficient to render all opposition futile.

For at least twenty minutes this silent vigil lasted, and then a soft, mysterious glow began to steal in through the hall windows, revealing the sleepers in every corner and making the lamp burn dim.

The dawn had begun, and with it a soft sighing breeze came through the hall windows, rustling the plumes on many a helm.

The figure of Guy de Coucy rose from the Master's chair and made a sign to the Constable, then left the dais, followed by Marcel, and went down the hall to the door.

There it was met by Eustace, and the three crossed the court and came to the gate, now plainly visible in the gray dawn.

The distant jingle of accouterments told of the coming of a column of cavalry, and almost at the same moment a sudden cry of surprise came from the summit of the gate-tower, followed by the sound of a heavy, crashing blow and the clank of a falling man in armor.

"It is time. Sound!" shouted a clear voice, and in a moment the blare of trumpets rung through the castle while cries of terror, stern orders to "Surrender," heavy, crashing blows, groans and shrieks for one brief minute made the castle a perfect pandemonium.

Then the noise ceased, to be followed by a thundering cheer of victory, as the banner of King Philip came into sight and his column of knights trotted into the castle unopposed.

It was true, as Jacques d'Avesmes had said: the castle was taken beyond a peradventure, and only four or five of the garrison had been hurt in the first wild efforts to defend themselves when roused from sleep.

King Philip rode exultantly into the court, and was met at its very entrance by the knight in the armor of Guy de Coucy.

"I call my liege to witness," cried the knight, raising his visor, "that I have performed my word by giving up the castle to him, and that I am GUY, MASTER OF COUCY, in my own castle, welcoming my liege lord to the hospitalities of Coucy. Your grace is very welcome."

Philip would not have been a French feudal king in those unruly times had he not known how to conciliate a vassal as well as offend him. He lifted his hand to his helmet in salute, and said:

"Right glad am I to see the Master of Coucy come to his own, and right willing shall I be to execute judgment on his guilty cousin, if the proofs be made upon him, of his wickedness. But you must know, Master, that it is a difficult case. All the world saw you buried, beheaded, in Jerusalem; and how you came here without witchcraft is to me yet a great and insoluble mystery."

"My liege shall see, when justice is done,"

replied the Master, gravely, and then he held the king's stirrup while Philip dismounted.

The Monarch of France looked around him in the court as he stood on the donjon steps and noted that the castle was quite quiet and completely in his possession. The ramparts were lined with his men and the white standard of France floated from the summit of the gate-towers, side by side with the gold chevron on scarlet of the Master of Coucy.

Preceded by Guy, himself, and followed by the Duke of Orleans and his train, the old king entered the hall, now fully in view in the increasing daylight, and beheld the Constable D'Avesmes advancing to meet him, while all round the hall stood the royal guards with glittering weapons saluting. There were so many men in the king's camp that they had enough to guard the defenders of the castle three times over, and the defenseless condition of the latter effectually prevented any thought of danger to the king in venturing thus into a hostile vassal's castle.

The Lady Adeline de Coucy, attended by her two maids, now came forward with all the grace of bearing of a lady of her ancient lineage, to meet the king and bid him welcome to Coucy; and the monarch graciously kissed her cheek, according to the fashion of the time, as he said, in his most gallant tones:

"Now, by my faith, whoever be the rightful lord of Coucy, there is no question as to its lady; for, by the right of beauty such as France cannot surpass, here is the true Chatelaine de Coucy."

"Then, my liege," said Adeline, with an arch smile, "you cannot surely doubt the word of the lady who tells you that this is, indeed, none other than my dear lord, Guy de Coucy; not dead, but saved by a wonderful Providence."

The king smiled in answer, but evaded the issue.

"Whoever he be, there is no question but that judgment must be rendered. Come, my lords, to the judgment."

As he spoke, he swept to the dais and took his seat in the lord's chair, with Adeline on his right hand. All this while Guy de Coucy had been hidden from the sight of his own retainers by the other knights round him, and now he retired into the press behind the king, so that no rumor of his presence had spread through the castle.

Then the king nodded his head to D'Avesmes. "Open the court, my Lord Constable of France," he said.

Jacques d'Avesmes advanced to the edge of the dais, and cried aloud:

"Hear ye all! Hear ye all! The great and most mighty King Philip of France, crowned and throned by the grace of God, is sitting in judgment in the castle of his vassal, to decide the case of the Master of Coucy."

When the stillness that followed had lasted a minute, the king continued:

"Call Gaston de Coucy to come into court. Where is he?"

"He is under guard in the chamber above, with his squire," was the low answer of the Constable. "The men drove them in, for they fought hard and would not surrender."

"Send a herald and call him forth," said the king, sternly. "If he refuse, break down the door with axes and hale him forth."

The Constable bowed and left the hall, when silence reigned for several minutes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CLEARING OF MYSTERIES.

AT the end of some ten minutes the Constable of France entered the hall, followed by Gaston de Coucy and his Squire Denis, both armed cap-a-pie and carrying their battle-axes.

Gaston had his visor up, and his coarse countenance was red and resolute, for he had been drinking to rouse his courage, and seemed resolved to brazen out the matter. Denis kept his own visor down on account of the shame of his disfigured face, but the swagger in his walk showed that he too had been seeking consolation for his woes.

No sooner had the knight reached the dais than he broke out in a loud voice:

"Justice, my liege, justice on these traitors and thieves that have stolen into my castle without so much as a summons to surrender. Had my liege sent me word, who would be more willing than I to let him into my castle and do my best to entertain him! I demand, my liege, as a peer of France, the names of the traitors who opened the gates, that they may be punished."

No one attempted to interrupt this bold tirade, and when it was finished Gaston stood in front of the table facing the old king, without any sign of respect. He seemed to be resolved to die game, now that his race was over for good.

The king flushed and paled, and bit his lips ere he answered.

"The King of France enters the house of his vassal when and how he will. Thou art accused to us of violence to a lady, of making mock of the sacrament of marriage, and of abducting the Lady Adeline de Coucy from the care of the Bishop of Orleans. Finally, with desecrating

the chapel of the holy Ursuline nuns, at the very moment of the elevation of the Sacred Host. What sayest thou?"

As the king enumerated these crimes, a murmur of horror went through the hall, but potential Gaston brazened it out.

"I never crossed the threshold of the chapel," he cried, boldly. "The man that says I did lies, and I will prove it on his body."

"Advance, most holy Hermit," said the king, in a low tone, and the great anchorite glided out from the train in which he had been hidden till then.

"Tell us what happened," said the king.

"I, myself, descending from the pulpit at Orleans, saw the squire of Gaston de Coucy signal his men to bear off the Lady Adeline from the church, and I, myself, from the high altar of the Ursuline convent, with the Host in my hands, saw the same squire enter the chapel with a drawn sword, and profane the holy sisters by looking at their faces."

"But I was not there," cried Gaston, with a coarse chuckle of triumph. "Call up Denis and let him answer for his own sins."

"No, by the Mass," cried that worthy himself, who had been thinking over a way to extricate himself from his difficulties. "All that I did was by my master's orders. We sink or swim together, good my lord."

"The squire hath reason in his words," said the king, gravely. "It is a maxim of our law that knight and squire, master and man, are one. Dost thou deny the sacrilege by thy squire?"

"Ay, that do we both, and defy the proof," answered Gaston, boldly. "Send on the champion who will dare to maintain it, and I will cram the lie down his throat."

"The champion is this holy Hermit who saw thee," said the king. "Thou canst take no arms against the church. How sayest thou as to the mockery of the sacrament of marriage with the Lady Adeline de Coucy by means of one Father Ambrose?"

"That there was no mockery. I am the husband of the Lady Adeline de Coucy, and here is the certificate by the hand of Father Ambrose himself."

And Gaston triumphantly pulled the paper from his gauntlet.

"What saith Father Ambrose?" asked the king, and the quaking priest was brought forth from among the prisoners.

"That I married the lady to the Master of Coucy in the village chapel," was the trembling answer.

"What saith the lady?" asked the king, in a puzzled tone.

"That I was not there at all, but one of my bower-maids went for me, thickly veiled in black. Here she stands, and with her Arlette, who went with her. Ask them."

There was a buzz of interest through the hall at this announcement, and all eyes were turned on the dark Saracen girl; who looked on with a placid air as if she understood nothing which was the fact.

Arlette stepped forward, courtesied to the king and said:

"It is true, my liege. I was with her, and she made no answer to the priest's questions. Martin Barbot answered for her, and this wicked priest mocked the sacrament by going on with it. We did not care so long as my lady was safe, and we locked ourselves in the tower and defied this Gaston as soon as we got home."

Gaston de Coucy had listened to this with a face gradually becoming purple, and when the girl had finished he suddenly raised his ax and made one stride toward her, uttering a hoarse curse of passion.

But that ax never fell, for in the very moment in which he made the motion out strode Guy de Coucy in his old and well-remembered Jerusalem armor and followed by Eustace and Jacques Marcel, all with visors up and lifted axes.

The effect was immediate and awful.

Gaston de Coucy uttered a yell of terror and leaped back off the dais, crying "Guy! Guy!" then ran to the middle of the stone floor, where he stood glaring and panting like a hunted wild beast.

"Your grace can see now," was the calm comment of the knight, "whether or not I am Guy de Coucy."

Denis, whose face had been hidden by the bars of his helmet, now rushed to the center of the hall to his master and began to whisper energetically to him, for Denis had a courage that nothing could shake.

But the instant that Guy de Coucy made his open appearance on the dais, followed by Eustace, both armed as they were on the day Jerusalem was stormed, a great buzz arose among the vassals of Coucy who lined the hall as prisoners. Even their fear of the armed guards could not restrain them, for the older ones recognized the figures, and began to call to each other that "the Master has come again."

Guy de Coucy heard the buzz and smiled proudly as he pointed out the retainers to the king. Then he turned to the center of the hall, stalked toward Gaston and Denis and called out:

"How say ye, Gaston de Coucy, traitor and villain? Who am I?"

Denis nudged his master in an impatient manner and Gaston suddenly seemed to make up his mind.

"George of Antioch or Bou Sheer, a Saracen wizard who hath put on the likeness of a Christian knight to cozen us all. I defy thee as a true Christian, and dare thee to the battle."

"Does my liege permit the deed?" asked Guy de Coucy, turning to the king.

Philip, with an air of great relief, said to the Constable:

"There can be no objection, my lord. Here is the claimant and here is the Master in possession. Let God decide between them. The holy Hermit can administer the oaths to the champions, and we shall be quit of further trouble."

Jacques d'Avesmes seemed about to utter some objection, but Guy de Coucy eagerly interrupted him, saying:

"No true knight can refuse a challenge to the Court of God's Justice. I can prove my cause by witnesses, but an I do so, my kinsman must die as a felon. Let him die as a Coucy should, with harness on back. Most Holy Hermit, I am ready for the oath at once."

The Hermit stepped forward amid a dead silence, and swore both knights, on the justice of their cause, in the sight of God, to do battle manfully and pray that they might be prospered according to their merits.

Guy de Coucy took the oath in a loud, firm voice, with a manner of deep solemnity, while Gaston hurriedly mumbled over the words of the oath, and announced himself ready.

Then Denis suddenly sprung forward and claimed the right, as his master's squire, of fighting Eustace; but the king at once forbid the contest on the ground that the squire had been sorely wounded in the tournament, and was hardly fit to bear his armor.

"If my liege will permit," said Guy de Coucy, "my poor squire, who went down under the felon blow of yonder villain, will fight this Denis Morbec by a champion, to avenge the cause of my kinsman, Baldwin de Coucy, who hath been hidden away in the dungeons of this castle, by Gaston de Coucy, to reserve for torture."

"Tis false!" exclaimed Gaston. "The knight has received no harm, and lies in his own chamber, in the north tower. Enough of this. Bring on your champion and let blows speak for me."

"He is here," answered Guy, and Jacques Marcel, burly and big, strode forward to meet Denis.

There was but little caution or feinting on either side. The four men rushed at each other with the fury of wild beasts, and plied blow on blow. Denis, with all the desperation of a man who sees all chance of life gone, but is resolved to die game, flew at Marcel, and the big peasant met him with equal fury, to avenge the insults offered to his sister so many times by Denis.

Guy and Gaston, both men of great skill in warlike exercises, plied their battle-axes with such fury that ere long the armor of both was broken in more than one place and the blood began to flow.

At last Gaston uttered a cry of triumph as he shore off the visor of his cousin from its hinges on one side, and left the face of the Master exposed. Hardly had he done so, when he received a stunning blow from Guy on his own helmet, which made him stagger back, and the next moment the active knight leaped in upon him, shortening the heavy weapon with both hands, and with one tremendous thrust sent the spike between the two blades of the ax right into Gaston's breast, piercing mail-shirt and cuirass, and casting the proud knight to the earth, gasping for breath, and uttering groans of irrepressible agony.

Guy de Coucy set his foot on the other and tugged with all his might to extricate the ax-spike, and as he plucked it forth a torrent of blood showed that he had pierced the villain's heart, and that the fate of Gaston de Coucy was settled.

Almost at the same moment Denis sprung away from his own antagonist, whom he had wounded severely, owing to the peasant's lack of skill with his weapon, and made a blow at the back of Guy's head.

Only the slipping of the squire's foot on the stone floor prevented that blow from taking effect, but Guy heard the clash as Denis fell, and recovering himself in a moment, he brought down his own ax on the traitor's head with such force that he clove the helmet in twain and scattered the brains of Denis Morbec on the floor.

"A Coucy! A Coucy! Live the Lord Guy!" was the universal shout of the retainers, and the next moment they had broken from between the guards, all unarmed as they were, and were kneeling at his feet, embracing his knees and uttering a thousand extravagances of love and welcome.

De Coucy had come to his own at last.

The sun was setting over Coucy Castle, once more in the hands of its rightful lord, and the royal troops had returned to their camp, while

the king, the duke, the Constable of France, and all the nobles who had come to the siege, were seated at table in the great hall.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STORY OF GUY.

SIR BALDWIN DE COUCY, rescued from his captivity without damage, thanks to the hurry in which Gaston had been when he arrived, sat at the foot of the table in his office of Castellan, while Adeline, smiling and happy at last, presided at the board beside the king himself.

The company were all silent now, for dinner was over, the wine flowing, and all were waiting for the promised story by Guy de Coucy of his marvelous escape and the secret of the body that had been buried for his at Jerusalem.

"It fell out in this way, my lords," he said.

"When my men fell back from Eustace and myself before the Saracens, we fought our best beside the banner of Coucy, till my poor Eustace was stricken down with a mace, and, as I thought, killed. Then, thinking that all was over, and that naught remained to me but to die like a man, I bestrode his body with the banner in my left hand, and fought my best. At last came a great chief of the Saracens, whom I knew to be Bou Sheer, and called to me to surrender, promising me my life. I thought of my lady at home, looked at the ring of foes around me, and yielded with honor. Then, in a twinkling, they stripped me of my armor, took up Eustace and carried him away, stripping him also as they went, and carried us out of the city, down the walls, by way of our own tower, and into the now deserted Christian camp. There they seized the horses in the stables, bare-backed, placed me on one of the steeds, and away we went toward Jericho and thence into the deserts of Mesopotamia. What became of Eustace I knew not then, but found out long after. I was taken to Bagdad, where the Emir Bou Sheer had a palace, and there he made me his house-slave and treated me very kindly for a while. Then it was that my beard was allowed to grow, and that I discovered that when we were both bearded Bou Sheer and myself were so much alike that all the slaves noticed it. Then, too, it was that I found that the reason he had saved my life was because he wished to convert me to the Saracen faith and to make me his heir after he had freed me, as is the custom of these Pagans when they have no male children. Long did he argue with me—for by the time I had been there two years I had learned the language full well. He sent doctors of their law to convince me, had me scourged and imprisoned to terrify me, offered me his daughter to wife and his palace after his death to bribe me, but in vain."

"Well done good and faithful servant," was the pious comment of Peter the Hermit. De Coucy smiled very slightly as he continued:

"On the contrary, I myself was so happy as to convert his daughter, Zuleika, to Christianity, for the maiden saw me in secret as I worked in her father's garden, and we had many stolen interviews. At last Bou Sheer, to make me consent, told me the story of how my cousin Gaston and his Squire Denis, in the valley of Kedron, had made a compact with him, the night before the Holy City was taken, to desert me in the battle and allow Bou Sheer to escape, if Bou Sheer would only kill me. He told me that to gain the money—a thousand marks—which they had promised him, he had placed my armor upon the dead body of one of his own Georgian slaves, killed by a Christian arrow, had beheaded the body, and had left it by the corpse—as all thought it—of my poor Squire Eustace. 'To your own people you are now dead,' said Bou Sheer, 'and none will believe you, however you swear that you are De Coucy. Your face has changed and none will know you. Your wife has married another, and your place is filled. Stay with us, bless the Prophet, and be my son.' That night I strove earnestly in prayer to Heaven what to do, and in the morning I had resolved I would make my escape."

Here De Coucy paused, and the king eagerly inquired:

"And how, how? Who aided ye?"

"Heaven itself," was the solemn answer. "That day Bou Sheer was in a playful humor, for I had told him that in three days I would give him an answer. He thought that I had consented or at least would consent to apostatize, for I told him I desired to read in the Koran to see whether I could believe in their doctrines. He was overjoyed, and sent for his daughter to witness that he gave her to me in marriage, and then stripped off his fine robes and put them on my shoulders, taking my slave's habit to himself, while he waited, as he said, on his 'new son and daughter.' We were alone in the garden, and had not noticed a thunderstorm which was coming on. Then came a sudden flash, and lo! my poor master lay dead before us in his slave's habit, and Zuleika and I, shuddering, saw that God had made us free in a moment, by no act of ours."

"How, how?" asked a dozen voices.

"When the slaves came, they found the poor Christian slave dead, and master and daughter weeping on his body. In a twinkling I had become Bou Sheer to all eyes but those of

Zuleika, who hath been to me ever since a daughter, pure and sacred as though born in my house. As Bou Sheer I was able to sell all my poor master's goods, embark as a merchant to India, and so return to Europe by way of Egypt and the Great Desert, till I came to Spain. From thence, still trading and increasing our wealth, as a dower for my little Saracen Christian daughter, I came to France and thence to Coucy. I traveled then as George of Antioch, a Syrian Christian, for I had visited Jerusalem during a truce, in the character of Bou Sheer, and had told my true story to the noble Godfrey, who helped me as he always helps the unfortunate. I revealed myself while here only to the Counts of St. Pol, Toulouse, the Constable d'Avesmes and the most noble, the Duke of Orleans. All have kept my secret nobly. If I have used, to terrify the guilty conscience of my cousin Gaston, in the castle of St. Pol, certain secrets of optics in which the Arabs are more learned than we, think not, my lords, that I am a wizard. It is all done by means of smoke, pictures and certain glasses which a Christian may lawfully use, and which holy monks have used ere this. I am home at last, and thus end the sorrows of Coucy."

"But we must surely wed this little convert of thine to some good Christian knight," observed the king, smiling. "She may relapse otherwise into paganism."

"So please my liege, the lady hath been pleased to accept the hand of the Count of Toulouse," was the dry answer. "The good count was a bachelor sworn, but he hath unwarily let a secret into the keeping of the lady, and hath begged her to marry him that they may keep it from all others."

"A wise resolve," said St. Pol, with a rather rueful look; "but my secret is out also, and I have no wife."

"Block up the passage, then," answered Guy, smiling. "A secret known to two is no secret, and never will be while women have ears, eyes and tongues."

THE END.

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